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A/N: Please Read!!!

The Story your about to read has mentions of Rape, Abuse and Neglect, It also has underage sex. So I will warn you now and before chapters that have that content if it triggers you do not read. I repeat do not read this story. If you are unhappy with this story it is not my fault because you decided to read this on your own. I did not make you read this story at all. I am giving you all a fair warning now and if I see and hateful comments directed towards my story or me they will be deleted immediately. Thankyou and you may proceed with this story.

Chapter 1: Cleaning House

It's almost hard to explain. Laying under my bed gives me a sense of calm. Maybe the correct word would be safety. Because it's familiar. I'm not accustomed to having a room, even if the room is more in line with what a cell would be. The bars on my window do nothing to make me feel safe. Mostly because that isn't their intention. The bars are there to keep me in. Not keep other things out. The door to 'my room' is locked. Just as it always is after I have completed my chores for the day. I'm essentially a prisoner.

Waking up with the sun, my first task is always to start breakfast. Three hot meals for my relatives so that they can start the day on the correct foot. My cousin Dudley cares very little for eggs, but he wants his bacon soft. Aunt Petunia loathes her yokes to be runny, and her toast must be very lightly toasted. Uncle Vernon is just the opposite, if his yokes are even a touch over cooked, then I will not even be allowed my customary one meal a day. Luckily, I have not had this issue since I was ten, as I've gotten better at giving them what they want.

After breakfast, Uncle Vernon leaves for work, Dudley goes and socializes with his friends, my aunt goes shopping and I have whatever wasn't eaten by the family. Normally this consists of Dudley's half eaten eggs and the crust that my aunt refuses to eat. Uncle Vernon rarely leaves me anything. Not that he knows I eat their leftovers. If he did, I fear what he would do to me. Accusing me of stealing food would be just the beginning. I can't help it though; I do not waste any food. At Hogwarts, I have to remind myself to not hoard food for later. Every time I see the sheer volume, my mouth waters. I can truly eat as much as I please. That isn't something I'm normally permitted. I clean the kitchen from the mess of breakfast and begin my other numerous chores.

While the laundry machine whirls my uncle's clothes clean, I start on the bathrooms. First the one in my aunt and uncle's room, then the one down the hall from my cousins. The toilet, sink and tub

must be pristine. I opt to scrub the floors on my hands and knees. The mop doesn't clean the floors thoroughly and if there is a single missed spot, then I will not be allotted my one meal. I've told them that we need a new mop, but uncle Vernon only sneered at me. I am the mop he says. Once I can see my reflection, I move to my next task. The laundry will need to be changed over. The second load of laundry is always my aunts. I'll have just over fifty minutes until the drying is done. Vacuuming all of the rooms is what I typically do at this point.

When I hear the buzz of the dryer, I change the laundry and put in Dudley's clothes to wash. My aunt's is drying and I am folding my uncle's clothes. If they wrinkle, I will be punished in the customary way. This doesn't take long to do and his clothes are put up. At this time, I typically take a short break in the cupboard under the stairs. Laying on my side, I breathe slowly. If I were at Hogwarts right now, it would be time for lunch in the great hall. My stomach rumbles like a clock announcing what time it is. I can't eat anything though. They would notice if food went missing. Occasionally Dudley will come home about this time for lunch, but it seems like today he isn't going too. That's fine. It's harder to get everything done when I have to stop to fix him something to eat. On the flip side though, at least when he leaves I get to nibble at his remains.

The summer will end and term will start back. When it does, I will have a break from all of this. I cannot break from cleaning for too long though, because there is more to do. My aunt's clothes are almost dry, I work on straightening up any bits and ends that are out of order. My clothes are the last to be washed. They smell thickly of urine. My clothes cannot be washed with anyone else's for fear of me contaminating them with my freakish ways.

While my clothes wash and Dudley's dry, I begin folding my aunt's clothes. I've mostly gotten use to all of my tasks, but it is still uncomfortable to fold my aunt's panties even if I am mostly desensitized. They are put up, and Dudley's clothes are thrown in the machine to dry. I take my wet clothes and single towel to my room to dry. Before his clothes have finished, I take a quick shower just to get the smell off of me. At this point, my day will be close to wrapping up. Getting dressed in some hand-me downs that are to

worn and large to ever be called presentable, I simply shake the water off. I am only permitted one towel and I need it for tonight. Dudley's clothes are folded and joined with the rest.

I just have to do the shopping for tonight's dinner, the cooking, cleaning up after dinner of course, then... off to my room. Tonight, I will make a nice casserole. Cousin Dudley's favorite. I've been making more of his favorites lately in the hopes that he will outgrow his clothes sooner. The less time he has to wear them, the better condition they will be. I have a box that sits outside my door. When he outgrows his clothes, he puts them in the box and it gets absorbed into my wardrobe. That is where the majority of my clothing comes from at least.

Since I started going to Hogwarts and have gotten my vault, it's been easier to splurge on clothing, but I have to be careful. I'll need that money for the rest of my time at Hogwarts, and possibly a little after until I get settled in with a career. Assuming I survive the war. Assuming anyone survives the war.

Once I'm back from the market, I begin dinner prep. Uncle Vernon likes to dinner to still be hot as he walks through the door and he does not care for waiting. Chopping the vegetables finely, I sauté them comfortably. I really don't mind cooking, and I think I've gotten decent at least. I wish that I could do as well at potions.

The smell of the casserole is heavenly and I fight to taste test it. I'll just have to assume it takes as it should. I fix a plate for each member of the family and sit it at their spot. Knives and forks on the table. Napkins. Once everything is prepared, I tell them. I fight myself. I mustn't watch them eat. Uncle Vernon doesn't like me watching, but the forkful shoveled into ungrateful mouths is torture.

I'm only allowed to eat after everyone else has had their fill. After the family finishes and leaves their plates, I'll allowed to fix my plate and take a seat on the floor. The chairs are for the family. I eat slowly trying to savor the food. I'll not eat like this again until tomorrow's dinner. After I've eaten, the kitchen must be cleaned again. I put my mismatched plate and cup away in its proper place. My utensils sit innocently on top. My dinner set cannot be mixed

with the family's. Double and triple checking, the kitchen is cleaned to their standards.

I rush to use the bathroom and then, my 'room'. From approximately 7 till 6 my room is locked. Uncle Vernon wakes each morning, unlocks my door with a loud bang and begins preparing for the day. That's when mine starts.

There is very little that I can do once my door is locked. Save for a bed and a scarcely filled closet, my room is mostly empty. Most of the time, I take my blankets- the few I have- and bunch them up under my bed. I'll lay in my makeshift fort. My safe place. Small but defendable. Sometimes I read books that Hermione has given me. That can help pass the time until the sun sets and I no longer have light. It isn't that I don't have electricity. I do. I just don't have any lightbulbs.

I'm afraid of the dark.

I'm honestly ashamed to admit that out loud. But I'm terrified. Creaking floorboards. Unsettling cold. The nightmares. The endless nightmares that keep me from being able to close my eyes. I sleep uneasily when it's dark.

It isn't lost of me how I'm trapped in this room. I've learned to mostly hold my bladder, but sometimes, in the eleven hours or longer that I am locked up, I cannot hold it anymore. That is what the towel is for. It's humiliating to relieve yourself into a towel and then shove it to be washed the next day. It's either that or wetting myself. Most of the time during the week, I can hold my urine, but on the weekends when my uncle lays in longer, my door will not be unlocked until nearly nine. I hate the smell of piss. I hate the cold. I hate the dark. I hate my cruel relatives. I hate my life.

This hell will never be home.

Chapter 2: The Attack

The pounding earthquakes came and woke me from my half sleep. Instinctively I hid further under my invisibility cloak in my special place under the bed. Sounds similar to bombs exploding ring in my ears and my instincts are too heightened too allow me to move. From under my bed hidden, I can see the door being kicked in and several sets of boots stomping violently across the floor. With my cloak, I run. There are so many infiltrating this house and I already know who they are, but I'm afraid to think the word out loud. The door is blocked as they search. For me. Distantly in the back of my head, I know I should be worried for the muggles that have taken me in, but first I need to worry about my own survival.

My legs scream run, but my brain screams hide. I use the commotion to hide in my cupboard. It is the only safe place that I can think of. I can hear some of them barking orders.

"Leave nothing unchecked. Find the boy." I'm scared. I never suspected that I would be facing this alone. I can't take on all of them and I can't escape. I fight the screams down when the door opens to my safe place and I'm faced with a tall man in dark robes and a grotesque misshapen mask.

"This one is empty." The man barks, but doesn't look away from my hiding spot. My hand quietly slaps over my mouth to keep me from breaking shaky breaths to loudly. Merlin. Keep going. You already said this place is empty. Leave. Leave. But the figure doesn't leave. It looks in longer as if seeing me, but that's impossible. A lifetime later, the same man grabs me and only the teeth biting down on my bottom lip keeps me from screaming. The boney hand grasps my wrist and I'm frantically trying to pull free. I can feel individual fingers long and pointy digging into the soft flesh.

Then I'm weightless. I can only feel fingers bruisingly engulfing my wrist. This is where I die. I'll be presented to Voldemort. No more Harry Potter. No more wizarding world. Or muggle world for that matter. I failed everyone. I refuse to cry though. I will face my

death with calmness. And I will go down fighting.

I don't give myself a moment to take in my surroundings when the magic wears off and we've landed. My fist, as tightly wound as I can, connects to this monster's chest. With a groan, the man squeezes me tighter before throwing me in a nearby room. The mask is removed, but I'm to busy preparing for my next lunge at him.

"Potter. You will do well to not harm your savior. Dumbledore is on his way, you will remain in this room. I must go back." Snape's voice is booming and allows for no argument. He looks at me hesitantly for a beat of a moment then with a crack, he vanishes. His eyes baring into my soul leave a lasting image. The entire exchange was so quick I question if it really happened.

Alone in darkness, fear grips me. What if he's lying. What if the person that is really on his way is Voldemort. Can I really trust Snape? He's never been particularly kind... more like he's never been particularly human. But if we were waiting on Voldemort, then Snape certainly wouldn't have left me unguarded. Right? Those robes though and that misshapen mask that is a parody of a tortured face. He is a death eater. I remember looking in the pensive, but Dumbledore trusts him. But I saw him among them. But right now. He saved me, right?

I can still feel the tight grip on my wrist and I rub it to alleviate some of the pain. The scar on my forehead is burning as well. I was told not to leave this room. For now, I will trust my teacher, but only because he saved me. That doesn't mean I have to numbly wait for Voldemort or Dumbledore. Now that I can breathe again, I take in the room around me. It certainly looks like a place for death eaters to congregate. The wallpaper is pealing, and the small lightbulb flickers- hardly lighting the room. The smell is musty like most old dilapidated buildings are. The furniture lacks any modern appearance. The furniture in the room consists of a bed- with stained and ugly sheets, a chest of drawers- that appears half broken, and a cushy chair with torn upholstery.

I take the spot under the bed and pull the invisibility cloak over me. I don't have my wand. At the Dursley's I have to hide it in case they

should decide to break the 'stick'. It doesn't change the fact that I am without a wand. Essentially defenseless. How long will I have to wait? What happened anyways. How did the death eaters find my relative's home? I'm suppose to be safe in that hell.

I don't know how long I waited huddled under that bed before a figure I recognized came through the door. Long outrageous robe, beard, half-moon glasses, and twinkling eyes. Anyone could recognize Headmaster Dumbledore. Still. For safety, I wait a few moments before shimming out of my hiding place. He says nothing, as if he knew I was hiding and waiting for me to feel comfortable enough to come out. I pull the cloak off of me and hold it over my arm.

"My boy. Are you well?" For the first time, I actually take note of my body. I don't specifically hurt anywhere. My head is burning, but that's per usual.

"I'm fine headmaster. What happened? Where am I? How did they find me?" His calm friendly face is such a relief that I have to remind myself to not embrace him. The savoir of the wizarding world must never show fear. Even if I'm terrified.

"I'm afraid there is much we still do not know. I was quite shocked to hear from him about the raid on your dwelling. For now, we will wait for Severus to return. We are fortunate that he was the one who found you."

"Sir. Are you sure we can trust him. I mean. He was with all of them."

"Yes Harry, I understand your reluctance to trust Severus. He is skilled at hiding himself, but let us not forget he had the foresight to look for you and deliver you to a place of safety. I assure you, he is loyal to you." The way he phrased it. Does he mean because of my mother? I saw it during our occlumency lessons. I infiltrated his mind and I saw him with her. But he hates me. "For now, it's imperative that you trust him more than ever."

I'm about to ask him why it's so important when a familiar crack sounds in the room. I can't help but flinch. I can feel the anger

washing off of this masked figure and if not for Dumbledore's calmness, I can't guarantee that I would not be running right now. The death eater... Snape throws the mask from his face.

"The dark lord is seething and it will not be long until Potter is located again. Tell me that you have a plan." Snape isn't looking at him. All the while his focused eyes are looking to his mentor. Waiting for any explanation.

"I'm afraid my boy, that I do have a plan of action. But neither of you will like it." Old crinkled fingers pull at the hair on his chin. "No my boy, you will not like it one bit, but I fear that it's the only option. For what ever reason, the safety of Harry's muggle relatives has been extinguished. We must create another bond. You know what I am asking of you Severus."

Thundering rage. While disagreeing often, Severus always at least shows a level of respect towards the headmaster, but any respect he normally holds is gone.

"Have you truly gone senile. There must be another way. Any other way."

"We do not have the time or the luxury of taking any chances Severus." Dumbledore looks to me. Eyes sizing me up he exhales showing just how tired he truly is. "Harry, my boy. I fear that I must ask you. Have you at this point in your life engaged in any form of sexual conduct."

"Sir?!" This is not the time for a sex talk from the headmaster.

"Potter." Snape isn't looking at me. "Just answer his question." The tone is defeated and empty from all the fury from before. "You must answer honestly. It is a matter of great consequence."

"I... no. I haven't done anything like that." I've not. I honestly have had difficulties even getting a decent kiss.

"Then it seems we have a solution. Severus. Believe me. It is the only way to keep the boy hidden."

"There must be someone else!" Snape shouts.

"My boy. There isn't." Dumbledore turns to me. "Harry. There is only one way to keep you hidden from Voldemort under our circumstances. We do not have time or manpower to cast a Fidelius charm. The mark that he left on you makes it all to easy for him to search you out when you sleep. We need to create a bond. A bond between a strong wizard and a virgin."

"It's dark magic!" Snape shouts. I never thought I would hear a protest like that from my sour professor.

"Yes it is. But dark magic is not inherently evil." Turning from Snape, Dumbledore looks me dead on. "Harry Potter my boy. You must enter a soul bond with Severus." Snape's face is twisted in what looks like disgust.

"A soul bond. What's that?" Snape's arms angrily fold over themselves.

"It means we'd have to have sex." He grounds out looking more than a little displeased at the notion. "And that our magic would be linked. The kook expects you to forgo any chance at marring or having children in favor of living your life with me."

"That's..!" I start.

"Believe me Potter, the thought is just as grotesque to me!" He roars. "And what of the consequences Albus."

"It isn't fair to either of you. Harry my boy, Severus is the only option. There are few witches or wizards that approach the level of untapped power that lays dormant inside of you. Severus is the closest in age to you while also being able to protect you should the need arise. There is no other option. It isn't a fair choice that I am giving you to make, but should you refuse, it is not likely we will be able to protect you from Voldemort, and without you. I fear the wrong side may win this war."

"Manipulative old man. Relying on his Gryffindor instincts to save everyone. Potter is still a boy. A child. He should not be condemned to this life."

"What other option do we have Severus!" Dumbledore shouts back losing his calm. "I would gladly hear any other choice that you can think of. I am old and do not have as many years left. You could at least be a companion to him even if it goes against both of your preferences. I am not saying that it will not be strained. I am only saying that in war we do not have the luxury of being comfortable. Do we Severus." Dumbledore give Snape a meaningful look and something akin to shame washes over Snape's face. He backs down.

"I have already sold my soul twice for this war. The decision is his." Snape says simply. His eyes turn to me. "But if he hurts me Albus, then it will not be the dark lord that you have to worry about."

Chapter 3: The Consumation

The three of us move to a different room. It reminds me of a library. Or what might have once looked like a library if there were any books on the hauntingly empty shelves. The headmaster and I talk while Severus sits a bit away from us with his arms crossed. He strangely reminds me of a pouting child that is reluctantly obeying his parent.

"We are essentially going to create a similar but stronger bond to what existed between you and your aunt. Because your mother loved you greatly and your aunt shared your blood, living there granted you safety." A thought that took me much to long to realize screams in my head.

"My aunt! Are they alright?"

"The dark lord is not ready to mobilize without obtaining the boy who lived. His ultimate goal is to remain in hiding until such time. No lasting harm was done to any of the muggles in that area and their memories were wiped." Snape says distastefully. I'm relieved. Not that I particularly cared about my relatives. They certainly detested me. But the three of them. The dynamic of that family wasn't a bad one. My Aunt and Uncle were loving parents, and my cousin- though spoiled- loved them back.

Moving back on track, Snape returns to his quiet pouting- and Dumbledore returns to instructing me on this action that he wishes me to take.

"You would live here in Severus's dwelling." So, this is where he lives. It makes sense that a sallow man like Snape would live in such a decaying home. "This will become your home as well if you agree to bond your soul to his." I'm not locked in a cupboard yet, so I'd say it's already an improvement. "Severus would continue being a spy. At this point in the war more than ever, it's imperative for us to have as much information as possible."

"Sir, I honestly don't understand what a soul bond is, or what it means." Dumbledore seems lost for words as how to best explain it. It's actually Snape who answers my question.

"It is the magical equivalent of marrying someone. Thus, why we would have to have sex to consummate the union. Dumbledore can essentially be considered a 'Justice of the Peace' and he would wed us. Because of the 'Love bond'" Snape sneers at the phrasing. "it could recreate the bond that Lily had for you. It also is such a Slytherin action that the dark lord would not calculate this rebuttal. Soul bonds performed for gain are often considered to be dark in nature and are rarely performed to this end outside of high class pure-blood wizarding families that cannot take the chance of their son or daughter being bonded to someone with lessor blood. It is even less common for it to be done between two men. The dark lord would never predict this."

"Can the bond be broken after the war?" Dumbledore looks to Snape. They both seem to be having an unspoken argument. Snape glares back at him. With a glare focused completely on the headmaster, Snape exhales agitatedly.

"Yes. I can break the bond." Snape concedes haughtily. Dumbledore looks to me for my decision and Snape looks farther away.

"I do not want to have my first time with Snape." Or have any time with him for that matter. "But It looks like I do not have much choice in the matter. As long as the bond can be broken when this war is over, then I agree." After all, it's just sex.

"Do you also agree Severus?" Snape looks like he's being executed.

"I agree." Dumbledore nods. His wand in his hand, he swirls it clinically. For a half moment I feel my magic falling before returning to normal. Snape looks exhausted.

"It is done. At that is left is for it to be consummated." Snape looks green. I try to not take offense to that. I'm glad he's not ecstatic about having sex with me, but we don't have much choice. He could do worse. Much worse. But I feel a little green as well. "I will leave the two of you. It is late. Consummate before either of you sleep."

Dumbledore lays his hand on Snape's shoulder. "I'm sorry my boy. Believe that this is the only way." Snape shrugs the hand off without a single word. "I will be back tomorrow to check in." I nod to him and he apparates away with a crack. For a long while, there is only silence. Snape breaks it.

"Come along Potter." He doesn't turn to look at me, but I follow him all the same. He opens a door; this bedroom looks to be in a better state than the other I was in. "This will be your room." He closes the door and I follow him to another room down the hall. This time when he opens the door we both go inside. "This is my room. Wait here. I will go and shower, then we will get this horrid mess over with. Hold your exhaustion. Do not sleep or the dark lord will more easily be able to find you. Once the bond is consummated, you can rest easy. He will not be able to find you." He doesn't leave me time to argue or question.

My bare feet feel cold. That's right, I don't have any socks or shoes. Or my wand. I'll need to tell Dumbledore tomorrow. I'm glad that I slept in my blue jeans and one of my stretched-out shirts. Occasionally I would sleep in just my underwear and I certainly am glad to have some clothes at least. I'll need more. I look around my potion professor's room. It's of the same caliber as the one he presented as mine. Not particularly nice, but relatively clean. It's livable.

My thoughts abruptly stop when Snape returns to his room. He's in a thick dark blue bathrobe. Without looking at me he sits reluctantly on the bed.

"A set of rules Potter. The lights will remain off. There will be no unnecessary touching. I will lay on my stomach and not move. Do what you must, finish quickly, and leave. You will not attempt to harm me in any way or I can guarantee your life will become much harder. Do whatever you must to finish as quickly and quietly as possible. Have I made myself clear?" The shower has done nothing to clean off that layer of exhaustion that he seems to emit, but at least I'll know he's clean.

"Yes sir. Snape, I don't know what I'm doing."

"That is of no consequence. It does not have to be good, just quick." He reiterates. "And if you dare to 'finish' inside of me then I will see to it that you are never able to ejaculate again." He mutters with a glare.

I can't believe I'm about to ask this. "What about uh... preparation. Since we are both males, if the uh.. area isn't." His jaw is set tightly.

"It has already been taken care of Potter." He says lowly. "Now turn off the lights so that we can get this over with." I don't particularly want the lights to be on, but the fear sets in again the moment I am in the dark. Tiptoeing carefully to the bed so that I do not stumble over anything, I eventually manage to find the side of the bed. Against my bare foot, I can feel the soft material of a bath robe. So he's undressed then. I shed my clothes as well. The noise is to loud in the otherwise quiet room.

I can hear his calculated breathing. Raising and falling like a metronome. Once I undress, I climb on the bed. Why must the magical world be so complicated. I never wanted or expected to be naked in a bed with my naked professor. Now to find him in the dark. I reach my hand slowly trying to find anything that might be him.

Something that feels similar to a shoulder is under my hands. He's tense, but his skin is soft and warm to the touch. He isn't a hard statue. Under the softness of the skin, I can feel jutting bones. You don't' have to see Snape naked to know he's too thin. "No unnecessary touching Potter!" He growls out.

"Sorry. It's not exactly easy to see what I'm doing." I throw back. He doesn't say anything in return. Now that I know where he's at, at least, I straddle him like I've seen in pornos. This is definitely not what I expected to do. "Uh. Professor. I'm not exactly uh.. hard."

"Well don't expect me to arouse you! As far as I'm concerned, I'm not here." His voice is restrained and detached. I don't want to do this. "I'm not here." He whispers quietly- more to himself than me.

I grab my flaccid penis and attempt to get hard. Yes, I don't have to think of it as having Sex with Snape. When the war ends, he will

break the bond, I'm just practicing. I try to think of who I would want to have sex with. Yes, I want a family, but my mind always skips over the idea of sex to get a child. There isn't anyone in particular that I want to shag. No on in particular that 'arouses' me.

I can feel the body under me shiver from cold. It feels warm to me though. I can feel the soft curve of a rather small bottom. The person under me is narrow. If I really think about it, I can think of him as a girl. I don't really know if I want to think of him as a girl though. Am I even attracted to girls. Sure, if I want a family I'll have to shag a girl and get her pregnant, I've always known that, but that's the only reason I can think to why I would shag a girl. I don't know that I'm particularly interested in shagging guys either.

"Stop thinking and put it in Potter!" The angry tone pulls me from my musings. I pump myself a few times. Is he aroused? I mean I guess it doesn't matter. This isn't an act of pleasure so much as an act of necessity. I settle on not wanting to know if he's aroused or not. I'm thankful that it doesn't take much to become hard.

Should I warn him that I'm going to start. I suppose I should enter him slowly, but he wants to just hurry and get it over with. If I ask him, he's only going to get pissyer. He expects me to just know.

"I'm going to start now." I say simply. I don't say his name. I don't want to think about that right now. I think it doesn't matter if it's a girl or guy. I just want to find someone to love me. I think that'll be good enough. And if one day that person I find to really soul bond with happens to be a guy, then I'm sure he will love me enough to be fine with adopting a child. Yes. I think that's what I want.

I don't pay much attention to if it feels good or not. I suppose it does. He is soft around me. I thrust fully into the body under my own. He makes no sounds, but his entire body is stiff. Maybe I'm not doing it right. I don't want this either, but I don't want to be hurting him! Isn't it normal to want to make your partner feel good. I know he said no unnecessary touching, but... I gently lay my hand over the bony shoulder. "Sir, are you..."

But his weak voice cuts me off.

"Potter, please just get this over with." The voice resonates with me. It's not a voice filled with pleasure. Or even one filled with anger. It's shaky even though he says the words clearly. "I'm not here." He whispers again, and I know that it's crazy and I know I'm not doing anything wrong, but it feels like I'm assaulting him.

Immediately I pull out.

I didn't cum, and I'm completely flaccid again, but we had sex.

"I'm done professor, I'm going to my room." The Gryffindor part of me want to stay to see if he's okay, but the part of me that was almost sorted into Slytherin understands. If I want to show him kindness right now, I have to leave. I don't know what I was talked into doing to him, but clearly, I've done something terrible.

Notes:

So like. I actually did research on if it counts as consumation if the guy does not cum the first time. Lol. And naturally because it's the internet I saw lots of mixed opinions. For my purposes, yes. And honestly to me it makes sense yes guys tend to cum, but a lot of girls do not especially the first time... and that still counts so why not with guys also... and yea.
Now about the story. Just as a warning, this story will likely be a slow burn. Yes. For those that are worried this will have a happy ending and eventually it will be fluffy and yay and all that, but to me for this story building the relationship between Harry and Severus is my goal. I don't want them to skip over friendship or understanding and go straight to lovers. yes they technically had sex, but it was loveless sex. Anywho just musing to myself.

Chapter 4: Niffy: head elf

I'm a light sleeper, I always have been. So when a house elf appears in my room, I'm fully awake before the magic even has time to settle.

"Begging your pardon Master Potter sir. I am Niffy, the head elf." She bows lowly. "If there is anything you would like or need, simply call me. The other elves are still in training and are not yet prepared to help master, but Niffy will care for you." She talks calmly and clearly. I've never met a house elf like this. She's speaks well and confidently. She is dressed in a pretty blue flower-print dress instead of the customary tarp that I've seen all other house elves wear. Half of her body is twisted and gnarly looking and she catches me staring. "Never you mind Master Potter sir, Niffy is more than capable of taking care of Master Potter."

She puts all of her weight on her uninjured side. Her right arm looks completely unusable, I don't even know how she manages to stand. I force myself to not look any longer. I don't intend to be rude. Did Snape do that to her. No. He wouldn't do something that cruel... at least I don't think. Snape. Is he okay. Last night comes back to me.

"Niffy, has Snape woken up yet?"

"Oh no, Sevy lays in most of the day when he can." Sevy? Not Master Snape. Not Mater Severus... Sevy? "Come along. Niffy will find you something for breakfast." My stomach growls at the word. "And after Master Potter has eaten, Niffy will give you the tour and introduce you to the other house elves." This place isn't that big, and Snape spends most of the year at Hogwarts, I don't know why he would need more than one. And if the 'head elf' is this horribly stricken then I'm concerned about the others.

Niffy motions for me to take a seat on one of the rickety chairs at the dilapidated table in the kitchen. Most of this house seems to be in disrepair. The layer of grim coating everything makes me

uncomfortable. It could do with a good scrubbing. From top to bottom. I very well may do that... not for him so much as for me. If I'm going to be living here, then I will be living in a clean house. Niffy carefully sets a plate in front of me.

"Begging your pardon Master Potter sir. There is not much in the way of food; Niffy is afraid that this is the best she can do at the moment." The pancakes are simple enough. Nothing fancy, but they taste heavenly. She watches me intently as I eat every bite. It makes me uncomfortable.

"Niffy. Are you uh.. hungry?" I've heard stories of masters withholding food from their house elves. I will not stand for that if that is the case, Snape can just...

"Not at all Master Potter. Niffy is just making sure you eat and not hide your food like Sevey tries to do." I remember how boney that shoulder felt under my hand.

"Does he hide his food often?"

"Never you mind that. Master Potter needs to be concerned about Master Potter eating." She smiles steadfastly at me. "And Niffy will be concerned about Sevey eating." She says this with a caring smile. For whatever reason, she seems to actually like Snape. I finish eating and immediately she takes the plate and promptly cleans it. It appears difficult for her to do with her one good arm.

"Niffy, I can clean that."

"Absolutely not Master Potter." She hobbles down from the footstool in front of the sink and takes my hand in her good one. "Niffy will now show you where everything is." I loosely hold her hand as she walks us out of the kitchen. "There is three floors. On the ground floor, is the kitchen, the library, the sitting room, your room of course." She is motioning to various doors. "That door is Sevy's room, and the room across is the bathroom." Snape's door is firmly shut. She pays it no mind as we hobble upstairs.

"There is another bathroom right there." She motions to the end of a hall. "That door is the master bedroom, Sevy doesn't like it in there.

He says it's to far away. And that pink door." She looks thoughtful for a moment. "That pink door is the Princess's room. Everyone is forbidden to enter. I do not want Snapey getting mad at you for snooping, so stay away from there." I nod to her. "I am serious Master Potter. There is not quicker way to upset him. I understand you are a curious young boy, I can respect that. Sevy has always been very curious too, but do not tamper with the Princess's room"

"I wasn't aware that there was anyone else living here." She shakes her head.

"No. The princess hasn't lived here in a very long time." She squeezes my hand and brings me back to the stairs. All the way down we come to what must have been a basement at one point. It is now sectioned off into two parts. A large lab, and a room.

"That room is where Niffy and the other elves live. This is Sevy's lab." This is the first room I've seen in this house that actually seems to be decently taken care of. It makes sense why the library shelves were empty, it seems that all of the books have been relocated to the shelves down here. "This room is actually pretty new. Everything considered." She leads me to the room, but has to let go of my hand to open the door. She motions me inside.

There are four small beds, two on each side. Three house elves are sitting on one of the beds talking. Niffy leads me to the small things. All three are young. Much to young. The oldest of the three doesn't even look at me. Instead he stares blankly at the wall.

"Brux, introduce yourself to Master Potter." Niffy says patiently. He doesn't turn to look at me.

"Master Potter, my name is Brux and I hope to be of help one day." He stares unblinking and I realize all at once. He's blind. Like Niffy, he's wearing respectable clothing-albeit a size to large like he's a child playing dress up.

"It is nice to meet you Brux." He actually smiles.

"Z... Z... Z... ZE..Zend." The next manages. "M... Ma.. master P.. Potter." He bows respectfully.

The youngest of the three walks up to me. A little girl. I can tell by the pink and yellow dress she's wearing.

"Wenwen!" She says excitedly. Niffy pats her head.

"This little one's name is Wendy."

"It is nice to meet all of you." I say. Niffy grabs my hand again.

"Brux, your task is to help Zend and Wendy with their speech."

"Yes mother."

"By by mama!" Wendy waves and returns to sitting on the bed. As we leave, I can hear Brux saying a sentence and the other two trying to repeat it.

"It is on the top."

"ii. Ii"

"It top!"

Niffy leads me to the library.

"Do you have any questions Master Harry?" She says easily.

"Niffy. I don't mean to be rude. I really don't, but all of the elves here..."

"Are flawed." She finishes. "Yes, all of us have deficiencies." She smiles sadly. "Especially poor Wendy. I have adopted those three as my children, all three were unwanted. Brux is blind, Zend stutters really badly, and Wendy, well. Wendy is one of the few house elves born that do not possess any magic. Their original masters did not want them. As my original master did not want me. Master Potter. This house may not be grand, but it is our home. I would thank you to respect that." We hear banging from down the hall.

He rushes in, death eater robes and mask. It nearly gives me a heart attack before I remember. He doesn't look at me.

"Niffy, I have been summoned. Please tend to Potter's needs until I return. As per the norm, no one is welcome here until I have returned."

"Yes Sevy, Niffy will protect."

"Professor Snape." Begrudgingly he looks at me. Even through the mask I can tell that he's glaring daggers. Daring me to question him about last night. "Be safe." He's quiet for a moment.

"Tch. I do not need you well wishes Potter." And he's gone.

Chapter 5: While The Master's Away

Snape is gone and I'm left in his home. Niffy bows to me and dismisses herself. I'm more or less alone. Wandering around, I see a cupboard under the stairs. How did I not notice that the first time? When I look inside, it's a bunch of old muggle cleaning stuffs. Most of the cleaning chemicals are unusable- many appeared to have expired twenty years ago. I leave them and opt for taking the broom.

I'll start with giving the place a good sweeping and go from there. I'm only about half way through sweeping my room when I hear Dumbledore's voice.

"It is quite alright for me to be here Niffy." I open the door. The twisted house elf is standing her ground.

"Rules is, no one is allowed here while Master Snape is away. No exceptions. You is going now, Niffy will tell Master Snape that you is coming by." Dumbledore is standing just beyond the door. Niffy, a tenth his size, blocks the way.

"Let me at least speak with young Harry first." He steps past her. The little elf snaps her fingers and Dumbledore appears on the other side of the threshold again. "Niffy, speaking with Harry is of great importance."

"Master's orders. No exceptions."

"Severus sure has encouraged his elf to be quite paranoid." He chuckles lightly.

"Trust gets you betrayed. You is leaving now." Dumbledore notices me. He's about to say something when Niffy promptly closes the door. "Master Potter." The respectful tone returns. "You are keeping busy I see. Niffy can assist." She motions to the layer of dust coating

my front.

"Is it really okay to not let Dumbledore in."

"Sevy said that no one is permitted while he is away. No exceptions." The other three elves come running out.

"Has he left?" The oldest questions.

"Yes. He will not return until Sevy is back." She looks to me. "My children are a secret." She holds one of her fingers up to her mouth. "Shh." Then smiling she looks at her adopted children. "Master Potter is wanting the house clean."

"Yes mama." Brux says simply. "Wendy, Zend and I will work upstairs."

"Good. Master Potter and I will start on this floor."

"I can manage on my own. There is no reason all of you should have to help me." Niffy looks me straight in the eyes.

"Niffy is not worthless. Niffy's children are not worthless." She speaks to me the same as she was to Dumbledore. "Niffy is head elf."

"I don't think you are worthless!" I'm holding my hands up nonthreateningly.

"Master Potter simply thinks that Niffy is disabled and unable to help."

"Niffy, I didn't mean anything bad about it. I'm just not use to having help is all." Slowly Niffy smiles.

"Master Potter has never had anyone tend to him." She laughs lightly. "I think maybe Sevey did choose a good soul bond then. Sevy has never had anyone tend to him either. But Niffy wants to take care of her masters. Both of them."

And so Niffy and her children helped me start on the long process of de-griming the house. We aren't near done when Snape appears. His mask and long robes are removed and handed to Niffy. Stiffly

he stands.

"Sevy, you are back quickly."

"The dark lord is searching for Potter. He is displeased. All of the death eaters are actively searching for him." He exhales slowly. Blinking he looks at me. "You are filthy Potter." I flinch at the words before realizing what he means. Dust and other filth is covering my clothing.

"I don't have any other clothing. I don't have anything sir. Even my wand was left at my relatives. I haven't had the chance to tell you until now." I quickly add.

"Niffy. Go into that room and see if you can find anything adequate for Potter to wear." Niffy disappears and Snape looks at me. "As for your wand, I have not head the dark lord mention that your wand was retrieved."

"I doubt they would have found it sir. At Hogwarts, I sleep with It under my pillow, but at my Uncle's I can't keep it in an easy to find place. It's hidden under one of the floorboards." He nods.

"Tomorrow we will venture to get it and any other of your belongings. We will need to see to it that food is in the pantry." He leans against the wall tiredly but flinches when his back actually touches the wall.

"Sir? Are you alright." Niffy returns.

"Niffy has placed the clothes that are likely to fit Master Potter on his bed. Sevy, Albus Dumbledore paid a visit, but Niffy sent him away, shall I floo call him and tell him of your return."

"Not at this moment. I need a shower first." She nods. "And Niffy," Snape darts his eyes over to me for a split moment before returning to looking at the elf. "Send me Zend." Her mouth is in a thin line.

"Yes sir." She vanishes and I'm left with my soul bond.

"Professor, I think we should discuss..."

"Potter. There is nothing for us to discuss." He walks to the bathroom managing to slightly hide a limp.

"Master Potter." Niffy nudges my arm.

"Niffy. Please. You don't have to call me Master. I'm just Harry." She looks thoughtful for a moment.

"Harry, while Niffy prepares a bit of luncheon, please feel free to take a shower upstairs." She smiles sweetly and I do as.... My house elf instructs.

On my bed are several articles of clothing, but mostly odds and ends. Some well-worn black pajama bottoms, a few shirts. I grab a nice reddish colored shirt. It'll be a bit large on me, but that's fairly normal.

I can hear the shower in the bathroom on this level. His hair looked clean this morning. I wonder if it always has that oily color because of the brewing he does. The upstairs bathroom is much nicer than the one down stairs. Everything on this level seems to be in better condition. I don't understand why Snape chooses to stay in the ill-repaired rooms.

The hot water feels amazing. I'm in the middle of washing my hair when I feel a sharp pain all throughout my body. I nearly collapse under the amount of pain, but it lasts for only a moment before it's gone. What was that. Did I turn poorly, or sleep on something wrong? But the pain is gone as quickly as it came.

I finish up bathing, glad to be clean. Hair still damp, I walk to the kitchen. Just as I walk in, Niffy sets a bowl down. I take the same seat that I did this morning.

"Good good. Harry is looking all squeaky clean. Niffy will go and get Sevy." In the bowl is a thick hardy soup. I touch the tip of the spoon to my lips and it tastes pretty good. I manage two more bites when I hear Snape in the other room.

"I'll eat later Niffy."

"No, you is eating now. You eat lunch at lunch time." I can hear her

chastising him. "Niffy will not take no for an answer. Snapey is eating now." I hear him loudly grumbling and complaining, but a moment later he is reluctantly sitting in the open chair.

She presents him a bowl of the same soup. Blandly, he stirs the soup, but never takes any bites.

"It is very good Niffy." He says to pacify her.

"You hasn't had any yet." She says without turning around. While eating my own lunch, I halfway watch him bring the spoon to his lips and then lower it without taking a bite. He does this several times.

He stands after several minutes of not eating. "I cannot possibly eat anymore Niffy." And he leaves. The house elf sighs while looking at the uneaten food.

"Maybe he just doesn't like the soup." I offer. "I'm sure there is something he really likes that you'll be able to get him to eat." She slowly shakes her head.

"No sir. This is his favorite." Her finger touches the outside rim of the bowl. "Sevy wouldn't be hungry right now, but Niffy can try." She exhales. "Niffy must contact Albus Dumbledore now."

When she leaves, I continue eating. I don't see how anyone could waste food like this. But I doubt he could understand what it's like to have to go without it. When I finish, I take what he didn't eat... meaning all of it and pour it back into the pot on the stove. We will eat the rest of it later. Maybe Niffy is right and he just isn't hungry right now.

I go to the library and Snape is seated in one of the highbacked chairs. He actively looks at me when I enter. I'm not really sure what I should do right now. Should I wait for Dumbledore here with Snape or go back to my room... My room... I keep calling it that, but can I really consider it mine.

"Potter, do not look into these words as anything more than an unfortunate fact. This is your home for the time being; so, stop

skulking around skittishly, it isn't you and it's infuriating. Just do as you please, rest assured I cannot take points from your house until term has resumed." His holds a certain level of reluctance, but he seems to at least be speaking honestly.

"I'm sorry that you've had to share your home with me. I know this isn't an ideal situation for you either." He looks ragged and not at all refreshed by the shower. His hair is still damp and sticking to his narrow face. His eyes are clear though. "I know you didn't want to enter a soul bond with me, but as soon as the war is over, I'll get out of your hair." He nods slowly.

"Yes. Just as soon as the war is over, I'll break the bond Potter."

Chapter 6: A Truce

"Harry my boy." Dumbledore says lightly. "Severus. How is your first day being bonded." Snape leans come comfortably in the seat.

"The dark lord is furious that he cannot sense Potter any longer. Have you discovered any reason as to why the bond between Potter and his relatives was broken?"

"No. He should have been protected until he reached the age of eighteen, and thus could no longer call that place home." Home. Did I... was the raid my fault. Because I didn't consider that place home. Because my relatives hated me.

"Tomorrow, Potter and I will be venturing back to that muggle home to retrieve his belonging. Knowing that he is not in the area, the other death eaters have given up on that location in favor of searching any other dwelling he could be at. I ask that you relocate Hermione Granger and the Weasley's. The dark lord is not above using them to fish out Potter. He has not yet thought of that, but in time he will. And we cannot trust Potter to stay put if his friends are in danger."

"No. You can't." I say flatly.

"Yes. I will see to that at once. Harry's protection was our primary concern."

"Rest assured, he is safe. Bonded to me, the dark lord will not be able to invade his dreams and search him out." Dumbledore nods.

"Good. Since the two of you will be spending a large quantity of time together, I suggest returning to Occlumency practice, and perhaps dueling as well to sharpen his skills."

The idle chatter continues, and then Dumbledore leaves and I'm left alone with Snape again. Niffy calls us to eat dinner, and this time Snape actually eats a few bites. Not much mind you, but at least I

know he does eat sometimes. He excuses himself part way through his bowl and Niffy actually looks pleased that he's eaten at all. I finish my meal and then join Snape in the empty library.

He's playing a game of wizard's chess by himself. He makes his move and boredly watches the opposing side make it's move. I watch a few rounds until Snape checkmates the other side. All of the rubble reforms into the pieces.

"Can I play a game with you." My voice pulls his eyes to me. Why did I say that? I stink at chess.

"If you would like." I take a seat. The white pieces. I move my pawn.

"Do you like chess?" I ask lightly. I'm trying to be civil. If he can be civil, I can be. And it looks like we will be stuck with each other for a while.

"No." He responds curtly. He moves his knight.

"Why play it then?"

"Because life is a game of chess." He doesn't seem to be paying attention to me.

"Ballocks." I move another pawn. "Life isn't a game of chess. That's a very negative outlook."

"No. it's a very realistic one. This entire war. It's simply one king against the other." I watch his fingers elegantly touch the top of one of his rooks.

"I'm not king." I say. He shakes his head slowly. His long hair sways slightly.

"No. You are a pawn. The Dark lord and Albus Dumbledore are in a war with each other. To each of them, their underlings are just pawns."

"I'm not a pawn either." I say agitatedly. This is what I get for trying to be nice.

"You are a pawn. Just, a very useful one. You would be the queen." He lightly touches it and it moves to the place he instructs. "You are the most important pawn. The most powerful. The most threatening."

"Then what are you?" I ask carefully.

"I would be the knight. Not the most important, but certainly the most versatile. Able to go behind enemy lines and simply blend in." He uses his knight to checkmate me. I didn't even see it coming.

"Sir. You are loyal to Dumbledore. Right?"

"I am loyal to whichever side the dark lord is not on. As of right now, the only other side is the one where Dumbledore is king. But do not be deceived. He is a man and not an infallible one." He resets the board. "There are only two kings, but should there one day be another king on the side of the light, I would likely join their forces." He looks at me intently. "If you were the king, I would be your knight." The words sound almost kind on his tongue, but he brings me back almost immediately. "Unfortunately, any army you would build would likely fall to disarray under such leadership."

"Just because I'm not good at chess doesn't mean that I would fail to keep those under me safe."

"Rest assured Potter, you will not have that burden."

"Can I ask you something." He sizes me up.

"No. I am not in the mood to be questioned." His tone is cold and threatening. Daring me to question him. He will not allow himself to be put in a vulnerable situation.

"I know you aren't evil." Those clear dark eyes intently search my face for anything additional information. "I know that you've done a lot for Dumbledore. And a lot for me."

"Potter. You are mistaken. I absolutely detest you, but you are simply the lesser of two evils. I can manage your annoyances well enough. Even if it's only just being able to tolerate them. The dark lord's reign must be put to an end. Whatever means need to be done

to accomplish that." He's no longer looking at me and he's speaking quieter. "The bond is set Potter, you do not need to feel obligated to treat me any different that I normally ask. Respect is all I require, niceties I have no use for."

"If we are going to be spending a lot of time around each other anyways though, we might as well try to get along."

"I have no desire to 'play nice' Potter."

"Why do you talk so badly to me. I'm trying to be nice. I'm being respectful. I'm not asking you questions even though I damn well have a right to know."

"You do not have a right to know anything about me." He stands abruptly, voice thundering. He's entered into his authoritative role. His pale face is flushed hotly with rage.

"I'm not your enemy Snape! We are bonded. You've saved me. You were friends with my mom. You parade around as this awful git at school and then you take in house elves that most wizards would not want. You walk around with such an aura of confidence and then when in bed with me you were acting as if...."

"Do not say another word." His palms slam down on the chess table and pieces fly. "Do not say another word." He repeats, but this time must quieter. That tone startles me more than the loud one. Immediately I back down some. I do not like hearing that defeated tone.

"I just want to get to know you. That's all I'm trying to do Snape. You said that this is my home and to stop tiptoeing around. If you really mean that, then let me think of this as home. My aunt's... that wasn't home." I look away from him as he locks eyes with me.

"You broke the bond didn't you." He says in unabashed awe.

"I don't know. I didn't even know that I could. The night before the raid. I was think about how that place wasn't home. I swear I didn't mean to break the bond. It isn't my fault. That place was awful. It was hell. " He scoffs.

"From one hell to another eh Potter? You should not have been a simple case of breaking it." He's eyes narrow in thought.

"This place already feels more like a home than that one ever did. Niffy actually chastised me today."

"Yes, she does tend to do that. I might have encouraged her to be a bit to out spoken."

"She really respects you. She actually sent Dumbledore away." He nods slowly.

"Niffy possess a high level of magic. Not that her original owners knew that. She was still young when she was injured, but she is very loyal to those that she puts her trust."

"How did she get injured?" I find myself asking.

"That isn't something for me to tell. It is not any of my business, and it is not any of yours. If you ask her, she might tell you, but that is between her and you. The same is true for the other elves."

"Professor, I won't ask you a lot of questions. I know there are things you don't want me asking about, and I know you don't like me, but this is all temporary. Just until the war is over, can we just have a truce. We can both be civil." He exhales exaggeratedly.

"I might can manage to be civil, but I will not promise anything. You have a knack for being completely infuriating." He waves his wand and all the pieces return to the board. "But I should be able to manage to not bite your head off for simply existing."

"That's good enough for me."

Chapter 7: Back to the Dursley's

That night, an overwhelming sense of dread just seems to leak into my bones. Panic rises and then falls. At moments I feel I can't breathe. I've never experienced this before. After what feels like forever, the moment passes. Just as I turn in my bed to try to find a better position to sleep in, I hear the door open.

"Harhar no sleep?" Little Wendy scampers up to me and climbs in the bed with a level of difficulty. I help the little thing.

"You do not have to be worried Wendy. I just can't sleep." She nods.

"Lay down, close eyes." I smile at the authoritative tone and do as she say. Sitting cross legged beside me, her tiny hand gently strokes my hair. With closed eyes, I hear her humming strongly and clearly. There are no words, but something about it fills me with peace. I can't find myself from falling into sleep.

My dreams are not free of nightmares, but just as the themes get to difficult to bare, a strong voice will begin humming in my ear again. My mother will be holding me as an infant, and I can hear her screams as she is murdered, but the humming brings me back to clarity. This is just a dream. A painfully scary one, but just a dream.

There are moments of my dream that do not make sense to me. An angry looking man striking me. A woman holding a child and crying while looking at me. I can see her mouthing words, but I can't tell what she is saying for all the humming. The woman and small child leave and the man angrily slaps me across my face. He grabs my wrist and I'm trying to yank away from him. I'm terrified, but the humming brings me back.

Groggily, I open my eyes. Wendy is sleeping beside me unconsciously humming. She stayed all night. I detach the small hands from my arm and pull the blankets around her. Just as I'm about to leave the room, Niffy materializes.

She takes a quick look to the bed.

"I was wondering where she had done gotten off to. She wasn't in Sevy's room."

"Does she stay in his room a lot?" Niffy's mouth is pulled into a straight line.

"It is time to start the day Harry. Please. Quickly get dressed, I will see to it that Sevy has woken up." She vanishes. Niffy didn't answer my question. She looked as though she never had any intention too.

Little Wendy looks so small in that great big bed. She's snoring lighting still occasionally humming. I'll have to wear the jeans that I came here in. I'm surprised to find them washed. Niffy must have taken care of it. I choose one of the other shirts that she found for me, and dress quickly. I'm desperate for some clean underpants. I take the ones I have on off. I detest going without them, but I simply cannot wear the filthy things anymore.

At the breakfast table, Snape is looking even more exhausted. He can't seem to even keep his eyes open as his hand curls around a cup of tea. He hasn't noticed me yet. Niffy tops off the partially drank up and then sets down the pop just long enough to ruffle his hair affectionately.

"Sevy, don't be rude. Harry is here." Blinkingly he looks at me. Niffy places a plate in front of me and a plate in front of Snape. More hotcakes. While I eat, Snape pokes it with his fork. For every five time he brings the fork to his mouth, he only seems to actually eat the food once. He pushes his plate away.

"I cannot eat anymore Niffy." He says simply. She looks at the barely touched food and sighs.

"It isn't good to waste food." I find myself saying. Both look at me. I feel like Hagrid... I shouldn't have said that. I should have just kept my mouth closed and minded my own business. "There are lots that go hungry."

"And me eating or not does not make a bit of difference." Snape says

with ease. "I have eaten my fill." So much food is still on his plate. It hurts." He stands and leaves. Niffy is about to scape the food in the trash.

"I'll eat it Niffy." She sizes me up.

"Harry, there is no reason. If Harry would like more food then,"

"No. Just that will be fine. Niffy, I really do not like wasted food." I can't bring myself to say more on that. "But uh, can we just keep this between us." She nods slowly, but doesn't throw away the food.

I'm completely stuffed by the end of it. I'll ask Niffy to start making smaller portions for us, so that less is being wasted.

Snape is wearing muggle clothing. Blue jeans and a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. It actually suits him. His dark hair is pulled back into a messy ponytail. "Are you prepared to retrieve your belongings?" He asks.

"Is it really safe for me to leave this place. I mean. I'm in hiding right."

"No harm can be done to you in my presence Potter." That's right. The bond.

"How does that work exactly."

"You do not need to be bored with the finer mechanics of it, just trust that no harm can be done to you." He holds out his arm and I take it. I feel that sick twist in my gut as we disapparate. Even once we've appeared, I can't let go of his arm for fear of collapsing. I'm waiting for him to make some cold remark, but true to our deal for a truce, he patiently waits for me to regain my balance. He doesn't move until I take my hand from his sleeve.

I don't want to be here. I hope they do not say anything... humiliating in front of him. I stay beside him up the walk and when he knocks on the door, I actually flinch. They are just people. They cannot hurt me. If Snape notices my discomfort, he says nothing.

My aunt actually opens the door. She sees the two of us and

focusses her glare on Snape.

"You horrible man!"

"It certainly has been a while Tunie. Young Harry needs his belongings. We will simply retrieve them and leave." His face is twisted into a mock smile.

"Neither of you are welcome here." His eyes become narrower as his smile stretches. It's unnerving.

"Tunie, the way you are talking is very unbecoming. I'm certain you would prefer us getting what we came for and leaving before your husband shows up. Not that it makes any difference to me. I would love to meet the man that was willing to look past all of your indiscretions in your youth." Her face is completely pale. "Surely you aren't keeping secrets such as them from you husband." He tisks at her.

"I can't believe they would let someone like you around children." She throws back. "After all. The way you were raised. Are you still living in that run-down house with your alcoholic of a dad?" Her uppity tone is full of distain.

"'Fraid dad died a long time ago Tunie. Shame you never got to meet him. He certainly loved young girls." She looks green. His arms are crossed waiting for her to make any response.

"Just leave before Vernon comes back. I do not want to see either of you in my house again." She looks down at me, then steps out of the way. My aunt doesn't hover around us. I knew that Snape knew my mother, it makes sense that he would also know my aunt though. They certainly do not like each other.

Snape follows me up the stairs to the room that I stayed it. He doesn't comment when he sees the sparse room. I go into the closet and throw all of my clothes on the bed... it's a pathetic amount. He quietly observes me as I find all of the things in their hiding spots. My clothes are shoved in the trunk."

"Did you not have an Owl?" He questions.

"I was afraid that Hedwig would be mistreated, She stays at Hogwarts for safety." He nods slowly. In the corner of the room, I pry to loose floorboard up. Inside is my wand and the Marauder's map. My wand in my back pocket and the map in my trunk, I'm ready. "That's everything." I say soundly. Snape grabs my trunk and shrinks it down; he then hands it to me and I place it in my pocket. Downstairs I pause. "Before we leave, can I just do one more thing." Again, he nods. He doesn't comment when I open up the cupboard. Or when I crawl inside. I don't want to have to explain this to him.

I only give myself a minute curled into that small space. It was my prison and my safe space. It feels strange knowing that I'll never lay here again.

With a cruel smile, Snape waves to my aunt and we leave.

"Snape about what I did... with the cupboard." This is uncomfortable.

"It is no business of mine Potter. I have an intimate understanding of privacy. If there is something you do not wish to tell me, then don't. Otherwise. You will choose to tell me should you make that decision."

"You knew my aunt." I say changing the subject.

"Yes, but it has been many years. People certainly do change."

"I guess, you and my mom lived close when you were children."

"Yes, she did not live far."

"I would love to see where she grew up." I say before I can stop myself.

"You can see it from your window. The white house on the end. The one across the river." I pause in my footsteps. I didn't realize that we were living in his childhood home.

Chapter 8: Like father like son

Snape and I settle into a loose routine. I wake up early like I'm use to. The house elves and I clean. Severus lays in and does not typically wake up until nearly eleven. Unless he's been summoned. I hear him coming and going at all hours, but he rarely has anything to report. Voldemort summons him a lot. Sometimes Snape is gone for an hour and sometimes he's gone all night.

Typically, during the day, Snape is here. Around eleven, Niffy wakes him and has both Snape and myself eat lunch. Afterwards, Snape will go downstairs to his lab and brew for a few hours. Promptly afterwards, he always takes a long shower. He really is a creature of habit. Sometimes he and I will play chess- I never win.

Sometimes he's in a decent mood and willing to talk, other times he stiffly ignores me. I think I prefer angry outburst to being ignored. For the most part, Snape has been true to his agreement for truce.

Right now, he's not up for a game of chess and there is nothing to do. He's reading something. I'm not really sure what, the cover isn't in a language I know.

"Cor aut Mors?" I try to words on my lips. He doesn't look up from the pages but answers my unspoken question.

"The language is Latin." He says simply. "Latin is the birth of all languages. Most spells are derived from Latin. It is a language that you would do well to learn." He turns a page and mutters to himself. "Not that you would ever willingly commit yourself to learning something useful." I don't rise to his bait.

"Can you read any other languages?" I ask instead.

"I am moderately fluent in seven languages. I could not pass for a native speaker, but I can understand the language enough to get the meaning in a conversation."

"Why."

"Why what Potter?"

"Why try to learn more languages that you have no need for." He closes the book, holding the page with his finger.

"No one can predict what skills you will need in the future. Should I would day need to know Latin, I have the bones to muddle though, which is far better than venturing ahead blindly. The languages that I have chosen to learn have not necessarily been ones that I would have chosen myself, but occasionally I come across an ancient text, and if I wish to read it, I must know the language enough to read it. Latin is a common language that ancient texts are written in."

I want to question him further, but his hand clasps around his left wrist. A twinge of pain settles on his features.

"I am being summoned. Tell Niffy that I will not be needing lunch." He summons his robes and his mask. The horribly misshapen look of it. The mask truly does remind me of someone being tortured.

"Snape, be safe." He doesn't say anything as he vanishes before my eyes. The book he was reading lays innocent in his chair. "Cor aut Mors." I open the books, and it just looks like words jumbled together. I can't understand it.

"Harry, where has Sevy gotten off too." Niffy asks as she comes into the room

"He was summoned, he said that he will not be needing lunch." I wonder how long he will be gone this time, I think to myself. She hums softly.

"Very well. Niffy is going to lay down for a quick rest. Simply summon Niffy if you is needing anything." I take another look at the book. He seemed enamored by this book. He was very intently reading the contents of it. I find myself wondering around this humble place.

So, this is where Snape grew up. I go upstairs. The master bedroom. I suppose that was his parents. He said that his dad is dead. I

wonder if his mom is still out there somewhere. I would think she would want to know that her son is in a soul bond. But he hasn't mentioned her once. I open the door to the master bedroom. It's in fairly good condition. Naturally there is a thick layer of dust from disuse, but the furniture is actually relatively good quality. The bed is made as if the owner of it could come home any minute. Across from the bed is a chest of drawers with a grand mirror over it.

I've known Professor Snape as a teacher for six years. But I don't really know anything about him. I know he's a private man. I know he can be quick to anger. I know he was close to my mom and that my dad hated him. But I don't know anything about him, just part of things that have happened in his life. I leave the room and close it behind me.

He acts as though this part of the house doesn't exist. There have been a few times that I have been using the loo and he's impatiently waiting at the door. If he really needs to go, why not just go to the one upstairs. But I've never seen him go up there. Or even talk about any of the rooms up there.

The perpetually closed door tempts me.

Niffy said that it was the Princess's room. Whatever that means. But who ever the Princess is, she hasn't lived here in a very long time. I touch the door and I don't feel any magic on it. When I grab the door knob there is no stinging hex. It's not even locked. It just innocently exists as if nothing about it at all is special.

I'm not sure if I should do this. Niffy said this room was forbidden, but Snape said that this is my home. It's just a room. A room that Niffy says is important to Snape, but Snape pretends doesn't exist. If I'm going to enter this room, now is the time to do it. When Snape is away and Niffy is asleep.

I shouldn't. I know he wouldn't want me in this room. But I'm soul bonded to a man that is a complete mystery. I turn the handle.

The room is pink. From the celling to the plush pink carpet. There are plush toys littered across the floor. A tiny pink and white rug lays in the center of the room. Against the wall is a changing table

and a crib, both in white. Above the crib is a mobile of stars and clouds. The walls are a pinkish sunset and the first glimmers of stars are starting to show.

The room is completely clean. There isn't even any dust. Which makes little sense because even the elves do not come in here, so the only explanation is that Snape is cleaning it himself. The room was obviously meant for a little girl, and a young one. Which makes even less sense because Niffy said the Princess hasn't lived here in a very long time. I know this was his childhood home. Was it a younger sister? Or maybe he has a daughter. That doesn't make any sense though. Snape wouldn't have any children. He bloody hates kids and that would mean that he's had to have been with a lady at one point or another. But nothing else makes sense. If he does have a daughter, why isn't she living here.

"You aren't allowed to be in this room." The voice behind me is chilling. I can't bring myself to turn around. I can't bring myself to face him. I hear his calm deep voice repeat. "You aren't allowed to be in this room. I know Niffy told you."

"Snape. I was just..."

"You were leaving." The anger is thinly veiled by a calm tone. But I can feel the rage underneath the surface.

"Snape, I'm sorry. I know that...."

"GET OUT OF MY SIGHT." Something loudly crashes into the wall and I notice that whatever it was didn't brake despite how hard it was thrown. I turn to hurriedly go and hide in my room, but I can't help but take in the sight of him. He's leaning against the wall, there is blood across his cheek and staining his robe. When I look to the object that he threw, it's the mask I see. "I said get out." He growls.

"Snape, let me explain myself." I manage to stammer out. There isn't much I can explain. I messed up. Why do I always go where I'm forbidden to be?

"This was the only place you were not permitted." His eyes are

cloudy from the pain.

"Okay, fine. I messed up. But you can yell at me after. You're hurt, let me help you." I reach out and he flinches from me.

"You will not touch me."

"Snape, I just want to help." I reach out again.

"I did not give you permission. You will not touch me without my permission ever." He flinches against the wall. "Get out!" Pricks of tears are in his eyes, but I have enough sense to not say anything about it. "ZEND!" He yells loudly and the house elf appears. Already the little thing is easing Snape to the ground. Noticing me, Zend quietly stammers.

"I th...think it w..would be best if you you you you w...w.went to your room." He says not allowing for any argument. I don't know how I'm going to make it up to Snape. I'm still shaken as I walk down the steps towards my room. Niffy is waiting at the bottom. The look on her face makes me cower into myself.

"You shouldn't have went in the Princess's room. You really hurt Severus." She says. "He trusted you. He trusted that he didn't have to lock it. He trusted that you wouldn't betray him." She's crying. Her one good arm is pulled tightly against her chest. Her tiny hand is squeezed over her heart. "If Severus was ready for you to know, he would have told you."

"Niffy. I'm sorry." Her large eyes bore into me.

"Severus isn't immune to being hurt. He was right. You are just like your father." And she leaves me to go upstairs.

Chapter 9: Goodnight my princess

In my room, I lay in my bed thinking. It wasn't any of my business. But I wanted it to be. The phantom pain comes back, and I have to stifle the groan. Everything hurts, but just like last time, it goes away quickly. Niffy had a look of betrayal on her face. Snape did as well.

I know he's a private man. I know that he keeps everyone at arms-length, and that seems to be where he wants them. I don't understand what possessed me. Being held at arms-length isn't something I want. Not form him. He's saved me. A few times actually. We've had sex. Granted it was more for the sake of cementing out bond, but haven't we always had a bond. Not necessarily a favorable one, but a bond nonetheless.

I wasn't afraid of him. I never was. And Snape. He didn't treat me special. And by not treating me special, he treated me differently than anyone else. I was Harry Potter: an annoying student that just so happens to be the boy who lived. Not the boy who lived who happens to also be Harry Potter. I've been given leeway because of who I am. Something I've not even really done. I didn't defeat Voldemort when I was a baby. My mother's love defeated him. I was just the by product. But because I'm famous and because I'm an orphan. I've been treated special.

I'd be lying if I said that I didn't like it at first. I did. It felt nice being important. Going from eating table scraps to some enviable. Someone that others would want to be around. I couldn't fathom that existence before I learned about the magical world.

It got old quick.

I stopped trying to date. Sure, there were a couple of girls early on, but as strange as it feels to say. I didn't want to be a notch on their belt. I didn't want to read the stories in the daily prophet. 'I snogged

the boy who lived.' I didn't want to read them.... Again.

He was cruel to me. But he was cruel to everyone. Even Slytherins on occasion when they did something particularly stupid. One time I actually overheard him deducting points from Draco Malfoy. It was just the two of them. I'm not even sure what he did to deserve the deductions, but if Snape's yelling was anything to go on, it was and I'm quoting "the stupidest thing you have ever done. Thirty points from Slytherin, and twenty more for assuming I wouldn't take points from my own house."

My chest aches.

I shouldn't even care. He's a prat. A bitter annoying confusing man.

But this is the first place that has ever felt like home.

At first, I thought I could think of Hogwarts as home. But there was no one there that really loved me. Not that Snape loves me. That's a ridiculous notion.

My door cracks open and I turn to see Wendy. She scampers up to the bed. I help her up and she sits smiling cross legged.

"Hi Harhar!" Her arms envelop me in a hug.

"Wendy, aren't you upset with me. I really hurt your master." She tilts her head.

"Wenwen no mad." She reaches up to pat my head. "Sevy sad. Harhar sad. Wenwen no mad."

"Wendy, I'm the one who made him sad." She blinks a few times then brings her finger to her mouth in thought.

"Wenwen broke bottle. Bottle had stuff inside. Wenwen sorry. Sevy said 'acciden' happen'. Sometim' people mistakes. Wenwen make mistakes. Sevy still loves Wenwen. Sevy make mistakes. Wenwen still love Sevy. Gotta say sorry. Harhar make mistakes. Gotta say sorry."

"Wendy, sorry isn't going to fix this." Her hand ceases rubbing the

top of my head and lightly hits it.

"Harhar make mistakes. Gotta say sorry."

"Wendy. I can't face him right now." I'm pleading with her to understand. Her tiny hand grasps mine and pulls me from my bed. "I messed up."

"Gotta say sorry." She repeats. She manages to walk me to my door. Once I'm in the hall, she points to the stairs. "Gotta say sorry. Sevy forgive." When I show reluctance, both of her hands come to rest on her hips. There will be no winning against her. She really is Snape's elf.

I take my time going up the steps. The longer I take, the longer it will be until I have to face him. I can handle his rage. I was raised by rage. I can't handle when his tone is weak and vulnerable. Something about it haunts me.

I stand outside of that pink room. The door is open. Inside, in the middle of the room, I see Snape sitting on the floor. His back is to the door. He's not moving. Just rigidly sitting cross legged. I knock on the open door.

"Professor Snape sir." I see his body twitch, but he doesn't say anything. "I wanted to formally apologize."

"It's just a room Potter." He says resigned. As if the moment earlier didn't happen. And the tone sets me off into thinly veiled anger. I will not go back to being held arms-length. I fucked up. At least with Snape, he would always tell me as such.

"But it's not."

"Potter. I do not wish to discuss this."

"Then just listen Snape." He says nothing, and I guess that's permission enough. "I had no right invading your privacy, and I'm sorry that I deliberately did something that I know you didn't want me to do. This whole time since I started living here, It's like I'm a child not being let in on the secret of Christmas. I know I'm still young. I know that for whatever reason, you feel inclined to protect

me. I don't know if your reason is because of Dumbledore. Or my mom. Or because I'm one of your students. I don't know. But I've seen what most kids my age have not seen. You can't shield me from a world I already know about."

He remains silent.

"I've been pretending since the night we bonded that I didn't notice the way you acted. You were scared. You didn't want to bond with me. If fact, you hated the idea more than I did. And I have a feeling that your reason for not wanting to bond isn't the same as my reason. I've been pretending that I haven't noticed how every time you come back from the death eater meeting you are injured. It's important for you that I remain in the dark. I've been pretending that I haven't noticed how you and Dumbledore will talk in front of me like I'm a child who can't possibly understand."

He remains silent.

"I was honest when I said that I wanted a truce, but that didn't mean that I wanted this. You don't have to pull your punches with me. If I mess up. Then tell me. If I'm prying, tell me to back off. If you fucking hate me, then just tell me. I can handle that over you passively ignoring my actions." I'm crying. I did not want to cry. "I'm sorry for invading your privacy, I just wanted to know something about the man that was friends with my mom and about the man that because a death eater and then a spy for the light and then gave up even more freedom to bond with a boy that looks identical to a man that use to torment him."

He remains silent.

"I'm sorry. I swear that I will not ask any questions anymore. If you want me to know, then you'll tell me. Otherwise, I'm not meant to know. But that doesn't change the fact that I still have a desire to learn about you. Even if you never share anything with me. I'll still want to know. Because there's more to you then you let others see." My mouth feels dry and I feel uncomfortable.

"You are so much like your mother." He says in his clear voice. "She was a nosey thing. Once she decided that she wanted to know

something, nothing could get in her way. She had a curious nature. Clear eyes. She could see threw anything. She told me once, that she knew I was lying to her, but if It's so important to her best friend that she believe the lie, then she would believe it."

"I wish that I could have known her." The tears start fresh. These are thought that I never allow myself to think.

"I'll tell you about her." He says evenly. "Not tonight mind you. I'm not stable enough." His voice sounds unwavering. "Now please. Return to your room and sleep. I need a bit of time."

"Professor. Again. I'm sorry." He exhales.

"You truly did nothing wrong Potter. It is only a room. It only has significance if I give it."

"But it is important to you. And I knew that."

"No Potter. You have no idea." His hand lays on the rug in an almost lovingly way. At that moment, my chest constricts. "Potter, it is late, and I am not stable enough at the moment. Your presence is taxing on my emotional state." My chest constricts again and the physical pain is almost overwhelming. I turn to leave and I hear him lightly talking to himself. "Sleep well my princess."

Chapter 10: The shoe is on the other foot

"Clear your mind. Bring up your shield." His voice is calm. "Now prepare yourself. Legilimency." It feels like a train is slamming into my subconscious. If it weren't for the fact that I know him better, I would swear he was doing this to punish me. "You are still making your shields to weak." He flicks his wand and the spell is broken. The library comes into focus around me. The empty shelves. The table where we play chess, and finally Snape. It's been a few days since I invaded his privacy by going into the Princess's room. Today he actually woke up relatively early and after breakfast, he announced that we would be having occlumency practice.

"I'm trying." I assure. And I am. We've been going like this for hours. I'm exhausted.

"You are not trying hard enough. Either shield or evade. You cannot do both."

"I do not understand." He exhales. I watch the man I've been sharing a home with pace up and down the length of the room.

"Cast the spell on me. I shall show you a demonstration." He seems sure of his actions. His hair is pulled up into a loose ponytail. It actually suits him having it pulled against his high cheek bones. He's wearing muggle clothing as he often does just around the house. The clothes hang off of him baggily. Sometimes when he moves, I'll get a glimpse of a pale collar bone. I try not to stare, but it's odd seeing him so relaxed. And the color of his skin is actually very... eroti...

"Sir. Are you sure?" He's far to private to willingly let me into his mind.

"Potter. When I'm prepared, no one can get past my shields. Cast the spell on me. I'm sure even you with your limited brain cells will

understand better once you've seen a demonstration." I hold my wand.

"Are you ready sir?" He nods. "Legilimency!" I wonder if I even performed the spell correctly. I do not see anything, but I feel a wall. I try to press against it, but I make no headway. I end the spell and he nods at my unspoken question.

"That was a mental shield. Now. Cast the spell again. I will not shield against you, but instead evade your probing." He nods and I cast the spell again. This time, I see an illusion. A field of flowers. A young boy. A young girl. Laying together in the field beside one another. They are laughing. Smiling. It's so peaceful that I hate ending the spell. "That was evading. Sacrificing a less important memory or though to protect the whole."

"Was that you and my mother." He nods. I would love to ask more about her, but he continues with his lesson.

"Evading is much trickier. When I am with the dark lord, evading is the tactic that I choose. Should he realize that I am hiding something from him, then he would no longer trust me. My shields are strong enough to keep him out, but he would know that I am keeping him from thoughts. Instead, I must evade. Sacrifice a memory that will satisfy him." He raises his wand. "If your shields are not strong enough to keep me out, then you must evade. Either method will suffice. I will attempt to infiltrate your mind and search for a memory that you would not wish anyone to see. Keep me from learning your secrets Potter. Prepare yourself. Legilimency!"

My head aches painfully. I see flashes of memories that he's calling forth and I'm trying to block him. I see flashes of Sirius dying. I can't block that memory, so I replace it with feeding Hedwig. It doesn't work for long. Everything is dropped and I'm watching myself relieving myself into a towel. I conjure up the memory of my first Christmas at Hogwarts. Again, I can't hold it for to long and a memory that I've long sense buried flashes in my mind. I want to scream when I see it. I want to block him. I want to hide it from him. I replace it with the first thing I can think of that will distract him from the horrid memory.

I conjure up the memory of being inside him. Feeling his bony shoulder. How soft his voice was. Wanting to not hurt him more. Realizing immediately what I was doing to him. Pulling out.

The spell is ended and he's looking at me. It's difficult to look back.

"Potter." But he doesn't continue to speak.

"It isn't a big deal professor." It doesn't matter that I'm lying. It doesn't even matter that he knows I'm lying. "It doesn't mean anything. I honestly forgot it even happened."

"Did you ever tell anyone. Dumbledore maybe?" He's not asking as a bond mate. He's not asking as a friend. He's asking as a teacher. I can read that tone immediately. He's out for blood.

"Yes. I told Dumbledore." I feel sick. It isn't something that I like to think about. It's something that I've never told anyone aside from Dumbledore. I can't say it out loud.

"He knew then." The tone is escalating in anger. "Did you tell any other. Your headmistress." I look away from him.

"No sir. I was... ashamed. I told Dumbledore and he said that we didn't have any other options. It's not a big deal sir." I try to say calmly. It's in the past. If I let it bother me, then he wins.

"Your uncle molesting you is not a big deal!" Seething rage. His face is twisted in anger, but I'm not afraid of him. Something about it is actually reassuring. He's angry on my behalf. He's pacing again. "Does your aunt know?" He asks. I look away from him.

"I honestly don't know. But it wouldn't surprise me. When I told Dumbledore, he did manage to make it stop somehow. That was about the end of my second year. I told him and he stopped it... but for safety, I had to keep living there. I know this may sound odd to say, but my uncle isn't a pedophile. You would never do something like that to an 'actual person'. He loves his son, and he's a good father." Snape stops pacing. "He would never do something like that to a family member. Or even to anyone. But I wasn't... I'm not..." I don't know how to say it. I completely freeze when arms wrap

around me.

"You aren't their family." Snape says gently. "You can justify his actions because he isn't family." It's far too easy to relax into those arms. He's taller than me. I already knew that, but I didn't realize that it would mean that I could press my face into his chest like this. It's strangely comforting to breathe in his musk. It's an earthy scent. His hand lays on top of my head in a familiar way. The same way I've seen all of the elves do to him. I actually feel okay right now. Like it's okay that it happened. No. That's not what I mean. Like it's okay that it bothers me that it happened. Like it doesn't change who I am. Like it's just a nightmare that I've had. Like Snape would never let it happen again. "That poor excuse for a human doesn't view you as a person so he's able to justify his actions, but they are not justifiable."

It's been so long since someone has actually embraced me, that it feels second nature to wrap my arms around this person in front of me. It doesn't matter if it's Snape. It doesn't matter if he's twice my age. Or my teacher. Or sometimes cruel. He's the one embracing me. And it feels safe. It feels good. My body feels lax propped up against him, but when I actually manage to fully incircle him in my arms, the moment is ended and I'm being held at arms-length again. Both literally and figuratively. He's looking down at me.

"Niffy." He calls her in a tone as if he was simply asking for the sugar to be passed. Normal neutral tone. His hands are still gripping my shoulders an arms-length away when she appears.

"Sevy has called Niffy?" She asks. She's openly looking between us, but says nothing.

"Yes. I am going out for a few hours. See to it that Potter eats a good lunch. He has used his magic in excess today."

"Yes Sevy, Niffy will get right on that." She disappears. Snape separates himself from me. He isn't in wizard robes, and he isn't in his death eater garb.

"I will be back in a few hours Potter. After you have eaten lunch, I would like for you to practice shielding your mind."

"Yes sir. I'll try." His face softens slightly.

"You've already improved greatly Potter, keep up the hard work, and you could be formidable in both Legilimency and Occlumency."

It feels odd receiving a compliment from him. I think... I like it.

Chapter 11: Taking matters into his own hands

Snape has been gone for several hours. I'm trying to focus on clearing my mind. I'm trying to focus on voiding my thoughts. It's hard. I just keep going back. Remembering that awful memory and then remembering him holding me. I didn't like being touched by my uncle. It's something I've more or less accepted. It happened. Move on.

But that's not realistic. I have always had a hard time since then being touched. Intimately or otherwise. Maybe because being touched was already so foreign. My relatives would never actually touch me. They would catch whatever sickness I had. The entire ordeal is a contradiction.

I'm not even angry with Snape for finding out. Maybe I should be. But he's the sort of man that has already made up his mind on everything. Learning something like this will not change the way he views me. Though, I do hope he keeps it to himself. I'm not much on sharing. I think I like the illusion that my life is ideal. I would rather strangers not read in the daily prophet intimate details of my life.

Niffy pats my head.

"Harry is deep in thought." She says lightly. She tilts her head at me.

"I'm alright Niffy. Do you know where Snape has gone off too? He wasn't dressed for a death eater meeting." She chuckles lightly.

"Niffy does not know. But Niffy has an idea." She manages to sit on the ground- fall more like. "Niffy became Sevey's house elf when he was a bit younger. Sevey's mom and pop were no longer living here- Niffy does not know the full story, and it is not Niffy's story to tell anyways. Sevey was the master of this house. It was only him. Sevey was ordered to dispose of me. I was no longer useful to my

first master. I believe my first master saw it as an act of kindness on his part. Putting me out of my mystery." She scowls at the thought. "Sevy took me in. Told me he hated this house and didn't care if I burned it to the ground, but I could stay as long as I liked." She smiles fondly.

"Niffy."

"Sevy is not always patient. He has a sharp tongue and a sharp wit. And a fierce temper. When Sevy was a student, he was prone to fighting. Even amongst muggles. There are aspects of his life that he hates, but he will defend them because they are his." She smiles at me. Her old eyes are light. "Sevy is very protective and Sevy is very loyal. Harry. Sevy will always be loyal to you first. Niffy understand enough to know that you were harmed in the past, I have no doubt that Sevy is not simply ignore whatever was done."

"But why. He hates me. I have all of my dad's bad traits. And Snape hated him." She nods more to herself.

"If Sevy hated you, then he would have abandoned this war long ago. Sevy isn't a cold man. I think, in some ways, Sevy admires you." I can't stop laughing. "It's true. You are always so annoyingly positive. I think he likes that about you. You don't think, you just do what you believe is best. Sometimes you muck up. Sevy has always talked a lot about you." She uses my shoulder to stand herself up.

"Niffy, thank you for talking with me." She pats my head.

"Harry is part of the family. Niffy would like for both of her masters to be happy."

The break from practicing seems to have helped my concentration. Clear my mind. Breathe.

Another hour of practice and I feel my mind slipping again. I do not want to think about my uncle and I do not want to think about Snape's scent. Or how pale his skin is. I want to think about a wall. Blocking everything out. A wall as tall as a castle and as thick as a train. Something can cannot be broken through. Something that can keep me safe.

I feel Snape's magic before I actually see him. He actually looks completely unharmed, but also disheveled.

"Snape are you?"

"I am perfectly acceptable Potter." He walks over to me with a level of grace that I sometimes forget he has. A large hand lays on top of my head and tussles my hair in an almost affectionate way. He immediately pulls his hand away as if I were the one forcing him to show a level of kindness. From my spot on the ground, he appears so much taller. "You appear to have been practicing." He takes a few steps back to provide the standard distance between us.

"Yes, I'm still trying to build a stronger shield." His arms cross over themselves as he listens. "Professor. I wanted to talk about what you saw. I know you would never... but I really do not want anyone to..."

"I would never tell anyone Potter." His dark eyes are soft as he speaks to me. I believe him.

"Sir, where did you go?" I ask trying to immediately change the subject." All softness in his eyes is gone.

"I took care of some things." He says blandly. The untelling sentence reminds me that I know so little about this man.

"Sevy?" Niffy seems to ask.

"I didn't kill him Niffy. We simply had a nice little chat."

"A nice chat that involves breaking three of his ribs." Brux says lightly. The oldest of the young elflings mostly keeps to himself. He and I have not spoken much since I began living here.

"Three ribs?" Niffy questions him.

"I did promise you that I would reign in some temper." Snape explains.

"Snape. What did you do?" I ask looking up at him.

"Potter. I simply took care of something that should have been done." Brux laughs at Snape's words.

"Did you... talk with my uncle?" I ask. He doesn't confirm or deny. "Did you?" I ask again. Snape exhales slowly.

"Yes Potter, among other things. You are under my protection now." He kneels downs to my level as if he were speaking to a small child. I've seen him do this with Wendy. "Potter. You are under my protection. I need for you to trust me above all others. We do not have the luxury of existing otherwise, and I will have to trust you above all others. I do not expect this to be an easy task for either of us. From this point forward. If you require anything or if you are unsettled about anything, you are to tell me. Not Dumbledore."

"Sir?"

"Albus is not inherently evil." Snape looks at the floor. "He is just blinded to the small details, or what he perceives as small details. What your uncle did to you was unacceptable, and I do not only mean the major things." He looks intently at me. "The headmaster has only one goal. Ending this war. He does not care what it takes to accomplish that. If that means good people have to die. Then they will die. If that means throwing a young boy to the snakes." He looks at his open palms. "Then that is what he will do. Uncaring if the action is morally right or wrong. If Harry Potter the boy who lived has to die so that this war may end, then Dumbledore will allow it."

"I don't want to die." I hate saying these words. "I know that I should be willing to die so that everyone else can live, and I wouldn't trade my one life for everyone's, but I really don't want to die."

"Potter. We are soul bonded. No harm can be done to you. Trust that. You are not selfish for desiring to live. It's natural to be afraid of death. You know the prophecy. Only you can kill him. You'll survive this war Potter. I swear it."

"I don't really understand how it all works. If it's that easy to keep someone from harm, then why doesn't Voldemort just soul bond

with someone so that no harm can be done to him."

"There are things that you don't know about this bond we share. Things that I am not prepared to tell you for your own good." He opens his mouth to say something, but then closes it immediately.

"How can you expect me to trust you when you can't even trust me with the nature of whatever it is we share." The way he's crouched down has his loose shirt hanging lower. There is something about his ivory collar bones that is just...

"Potter. I will not sugarcoat it. I do not feel confident in myself to adequately explain myself. I make an oath to you that when I am mentally prepared, I will explain everything to you, but I need time." He's human. Sometimes it's so hard to see him like that. He's not well put together. He's just a man still trying to figure things out at times.

"Alright." I say.

Chapter 12: Headmaster's back again

Dumbledore is checking on us again today. He's asking Snape if he has any news concerning Voldemort. Nothing new. When he showed up, he presented me with a letter from Ron and a letter from Hermione. Apparently, both of them are staying at Hogwarts for safety purposes. Their homes are being constantly monitored by order members. Snape said it was safe to write them back and send the letters via Dumbledore. I just can't mention my whereabouts or that I'm with Snape. Or anything about the soul bond. Still. It's been driving me crazy to not be able to communicate with my friends. I hate keeping this from them, but I don't have much choice. When it's safe to, I'll tell them everything. I was happy to pass my letters off to Dumbledore.

"He is progressing well in occlumency. He is not anywhere close to proficient, but he's improved greatly compared to where he started." Snape's face is straight. His posture is rigid. Both of his arms are held firmly at his side in a mock 'casual' manner. This isn't how he handles himself when it's just us. He's more relaxed, but right now. He's all business. "Potter. You are to go to your room. The headmaster and I have some things to discuss." I open my mouth to protest. I don't know why I don't. I don't know why I close my mouth and actually nod.

I actually do as he asked.

I feel like a child asked to leave the room so the adults can fight. Still. He asked me to trust him. I can't say that it's particularly easy to do as he says. And sometimes he's still a prick. But there have been times that he isn't. There are times when he's a decent human being. Nice even. Understanding.

He's made no comments about the things he saw. He's not asked any questions after the initial moment. It's like he understood I didn't want to think or talk about it. It's mostly been shoved to the back of

my mind. I go around pretending it never happened and most of the time, I really feel like it never happened. Sometimes though. I'm hyper sensitive about the... ordeal. Like the night Snape and I consummated the bond. It's just sex. And a part of me feels in the great scheme of things, sex is just sex. Do what has to be done and move on. But another part feels the exact opposite. I didn't want to... hurt him.

Being sent to my room and asked to stay here reminds me of being at my relatives. I'm almost afraid to try the door knob in case it is locked. But the only lock is on my side of the door. And realistically, I know even if I was locked in, I could always spell the door open. After some time, Niffy pops into my room.

"Harry, you can come out now." She smiles lopsidedly at me. When I do leave the room, Dumbledore is already gone. Snape is sitting in one of the highbacked chairs in the empty library. He's leaned over with his head in his palms. I'm almost afraid to disturb him.

"Professor."

"Potter." He says without looking up.

"Are you alright sir?" He exhales slowly.

"Potter. The bond between us was created out of necessity, still. I will never ask for your forgiveness. I would not put you in the situation where you are faced with the idea of forgiving a man who wronged you as I did. I defiled you." Is that really how he sees it.

"Professor. Snape. You didn't defile me." It's hard to face him even while he's not looking at me, so I turn away from him. "I'm not good with words, so bear with me. I don't know what happened to you. I guess if you want me to know then you will tell me. The night that we... consummated the bond. You were scared of being touched. I know you refuse to talk about it, so I will not question you. But... whatever made you uncomfortable, I'm glad that my uncle did what he did... so that I could understand a little better." That came out completely wrong. I can't believe I just said that. We've mostly been okay with each other, but now it'll be more steps back.

His body noticeably shakes and I would flinch if not for the easy laughter. The longer I stand and watch him, the more he laughs. It's a very human laugh. No maniacal cackling, or anything bizarre like that. Just. A laugh.

"Sir. I'm sorry. Did I say something wrong?" It's almost natural to watch this very human man laugh.

"I didn't think anyone could be so much like Lily." He's actually smiling and something about it is nice. It makes him look more alive and less stern. It brightens him. But his words are my primary focus.

"Sir, am I more like my mother or father?" He stops smiling and I actually regret my question. But he's pulled his thumb to his mouth to bite down on it. I've noticed that he does them when he's contemplating something.

"Lily and James Potter were actually very similar to one another. I would say their most defining features is their fierce protective nature. They were both brash and impulsive. But at their core they were good. Your father happily befriended a werewolf and a boy born from a primarily Slytherin family with little to no reluctance. Your mother." He pauses. I watch him look down at his open hands. "She was my only real friend. Maybe because of pity. My home life was more than unsavory, and she knew about it well. I don't believe she was ever ashamed of me. Even when I deserved it."

"We all make mistakes sir." He nods.

"Yes, but some mistakes are much worse than others. You are similar to both your mother and father, but you are also a person all your own. Harry, you need not compare yourself to either of your parents, you are your own man." I'm taken aback by my name.

"Sir, do you really mean that." I've grown use to praise from witches and wizards. But it is never praising me. It's always praising my parent's actions. Or expecting certain behavior because I am the boy who lived. I feel like me... Harry Potter was just praised for the first time. As a person. The shock is so great that him using my name hardly phases me.

"Yes Potter." He's back to formalities. "You have the makings of a splendid wizard and a strong person." He stands. "I have a bit of brewing to do. Go through your meditation and practice clearing your mind. After dinner, we will practice Occlumency."

"Sir. Before you go, what did you have to discuss with the headmaster?"

"If I wished for you to know Potter, then I would not have asked you to leave the room." Clearly.

"Sir. Please. If it concerns me, then don't I have the right to know. You asked me to trust you, and you said that you would have to trust me as well. If it really doesn't concern me, then I will leave it alone, but if it's about me, then please. Don't keep me in the dark. I feel like my entire life has been planned for me behind my back." He exhales slowly.

"The headmaster and I spoke of the bond that you and I share. I also discussed with him my displeasure at how the situation with your uncle was handled. I addition, when I spoke with your uncle, I might have used a few choice words, and his memories should be suppressed due to that." He crosses his arms. "Potter. You are my responsibility. Regardless of our differences, I will not abide the actions that were committed against you. As far as I'm concerned," He pointedly looks away from me, "the headmaster is just as much in the wrong as your uncle. I apologize that I did not do more as your teacher."

"You couldn't have known. I only ever really let Professor Dumbledore know. I would have never gone to you. I wouldn't have. I might would have gone to my head of house, but I just didn't want anyone to know. Even if I knew you would have been on my side, I still don't think I could have been vulnerable like that around you. I couldn't let anyone know."

"Yes Potter, I understand. Admitting to sexual abuse is a difficult conversation to have even with someone you trust." He's not looking at me.

"Sir. Were you ever..." I don't finish my question.

"Harry. Don't ask a question to something you don't want to know the answer of. Please. Some things are better left unsaid."

Chapter 13: The dream

Everything is hot. I feel like my skin is on fire. I feel like I have a fever. Sweat sticks to my neck and forehead, and my mouth is uncomfortably dry. Fingertips are digging desperately into my shoulders, and there are legs circled around my hips pulling me down on the person under me. There is a strange pleasure deep in the pit of my stomach, and all I can see is a mop of dark hair. Teeth are biting down at whatever skin they can reach and I realize that I don't actually mind. More so, I enjoy it.

I enjoy having this person wrapped around me.

The sweat from their body and the sweat from mine create a glue between us ensuring that we cannot separate. The punishing peeling of skin from skin is too great a discipline for me or this person to risk separating. The arms hold me as if they need me. I feel like I need this person. We are hungrily rubbing against each other. Any bit of bare skin is fair game and I can feel a familiar hardness against my side. This person is a male.

I don't know if that bother me or not.

I don't know if I even really care.

Because this male under me is whimpering each time we slide together in just the right way. And the deep baritone sounds just erotic enough for me to use the body under me more forcefully. Desperate to reach completion. Both of us. And he's moaning pleasantly in my ear asking for more. Asking me to touch him more. Praising me for how good my touch is making him feel. Pleas for more and mews to not stop.

I have never felt pleasure like this.

It doesn't seem to matter to him that I'm a guy. In fact, he revels at my manhood gliding against his blushing skin. I want to see this person. I want to kiss his lips and know who is ushering me into

completion faster than I've ever experienced before. But he seems to hide in my shoulder. This male who is longer than me.

His musk is thick, and I inhale it deeply. My fingers dig into bony hips pulling him burningly against me. I don't mean to be rough with him. My need is just unbearable. He doesn't seem to mind. His own grip on my shoulders and dig down in earnest.

"I'm almost.." The man says in this thick masculine tone. It's not off-putting. It's somehow more arousing. "Please. Don't stop." The arousing voice pleads.

"Am I hurting you?" I don't think to say these words, but they still come out of my mouth. I don't question why. After all, I don't want to hurt this person. I don't want to hurt anyone.

"No. Never you." I can feel the bridge of a nose press into my neck comfortably. "Could never hurt from you."

"I can stop. If you need me too." I don't think it would be possible for me to stop right now. But my tone doesn't reflect my internal uncertainty. The first utter of reluctance is all I need to hear.

"Harry. Please. Don't stop." The warm voice is like honey. I'm sinking into it. He arches his back until are chests are flesh to flesh. "Harry." He moans mutedly.

"I have you." These words alone seem enough to pull this mystery man over the edge. I can feel all of his muscles tensing around me and he screams his orgasm in my ear. Just his pleasure coaxes my own orgasm all over his stomach. My palm strokes his hair soothingly until he falls limply on the bed below me.

Hair the color of tar spills out around him like ink. Dark eyes still lidded with pleasure openly watch my every movement. Snowy skin is flushed with arousal. His stomach is sunken in. Chest heaving.

"Harry. Why are you looking at me like that?" The man squirms under my gaze. I reach out to touch his cheek just to see if he's real.

"Severus?" But just as I touch his cheek, my eyes open.

A dream.

Correction: A wet dream.

The mess in my shorts alerts me to the very real fact that I just had a wet dream about Snape. The dream is still fresh on my mind and I have to fight it back. It's one thing to have an unconscious erection about someone, but to actually become hard over them in real life is different. It doesn't make sense.

Our relationship is still mostly tense. Sometimes he's almost likeable. But I still don't know anything about him. He holds me at arms-length so that I can't get any closer to him. I wonder why that bothers me so much. This bond was only formed out of necessity. I don't believe he hates me. Far from it actually. I think in some ways he might actually like me, but the situation is too confusing to make sense of.

So, I fight the arousal down determined to not become hard over a man that can take or leave me more or less. Besides. I don't know if I could really even consider myself gay. The only man I've ever done anything with is my uncle. And that was mostly just him... touching me. I don't have any experience. Not with a possible attraction to a member of the same sex. I've hardly been able to find even a female that I've been interested in.

But maybe that's as much a sign as anything.

I'm sixteen. Almost seventeen. And there have been very few girls that I was interested in. Or even attracted to for that matter. I think I convinced myself that the threat of the wizarding world was a more pressing matter than figure out who to jerk off too, so it was okay that I didn't notice girls.

But I never really noticed boys either.

I've never had a wet dream about anyone in fact, until now.

I toss my clothes in the dirty clothes hamper... the sheets as well. I get dressed while trying to practice occlumency. No so much for the next lesson but because I can't leave this room with a stupid look on

my face. I'd die of humiliation if he knew. So, I can't look guilty, or suspicious.

At least not until I figure all of this out.

I don't want him to think something if it's not true.

I mean. After all. Isn't it normal to get wet dreams about random people even if you aren't... into them like that.

I'm not surprised to see that Snape isn't at breakfast. I'm up a bit earlier than normal, so I just opt to cook something for myself. Snape doesn't normally eat anyways and honestly, I sort of enjoy cooking.

Standing at the stove helps to clear my head a bit.

I'm halfway through when Niffy comes in rubbing her eyes.

"Harry, it is early." She says.

"I couldn't sleep." That's close enough to the truth. "Would you like some pancakes, I'm nearly through. I know it's not customary for a wizard to serve a house elf, but I'm pretty good at cooking." She holds her hand up like a silent refusal.

"Thank you, but no. Niffy is a good house elf, and does not need to be treated differently."

"I know it's important to you to not be looked at differently, but I'm not like a lot of pure blooded wizards. Just because I'm nice doesn't mean that I think less of you." She shakes her small head.

"Niffy is the head elf. House elves are different from wizards. Niffy is more than happy in her role, so never you mind me. Wizards do not serve house elves."

"I don't understand honestly."

"Yes, Harry was raised by muggles. Niffy is a good house elf that will look after her master. A good house elf is loyal and holds her master's estate above all else. An obedient house elf does not mean

a cruel master. Sometimes. It means a master worth protecting."

"That still doesn't explain why you have to act subservient." She tilts her head.

"Niffy isn't acting. Niffy does her part and master does his." She pats my arm as if she were talking to a simpleton. I don't understand, but I guess that's okay. I'm nearly done cooking when Snape enters the room. He looks like he hasn't slept at all.

Making his way to the table, he immediately lays his head down.

"Sir, would you like some breakfast." I try to sound casual.

"Hn." He grumbles. His tone makes my neck feel hot, but that's probably because the dream is still fresh on my mind. I wonder if this bond is affecting me. I place a plate of freshly cooked eggs in front of him and then start working on mine. "Did you cook this?" He questions tentatively.

"Yes." I don't turn to him.

"Can I even trust it to be edible. The way you have performed in the classroom leaves me skeptical."

"I can cook." I confirm. "I've done a lot of cooking." I hear him stand. When I turn, I watch him rake the food directly into the trash. "Why did you do that!"

"I have no desire to become sick from your ineptitude." Niffy is looking between us.

"You wouldn't have. Believe it or not, but I'm not useless. I'm a great cook."

"Not likely." He says crossing his arms. "Niffy, see to it that he doesn't waste food in the future with his failed attempts in the culinary arts." She nods her head slightly but says nothing.

"If you weren't going to eat it, then you could have just told me. I would have eaten it." He threw so much food away. It hurts deep inside. It makes me sick to my stomach. He turns and leaves,

uninterested in continuing the conversation.

Chapter 14: Insufferable bastard

An insufferable ass. That's what he is. An insufferable bastard. I can't believe that I... ugh.

It still hurt to think about all the wasted food. Did he wake up on the wrong side of the bed. Niffy is looking at the door way of the little square kitchen. She's shaking her head.

"Harry, Severus is..."

"Don't defend him Niffy. He has no reason at all to act like that. I didn't do anything to him." She exhales slowly.

"I'm afraid Harry, that he believes he does have a reason. I'm afraid that it isn't something that I can openly discuss though. Severus is complicated." She pats my arm. "Never you mind him. Niffy will begin cooking breakfast. Please go and busy yourself. Niffy will retrieve you when it is done." I'm about to leave when she tentatively grasps my shirt sleeve. "Please. Mind your temper. Severus means well."

I'm not surprised that she is taking up for him. She is nothing if not loyal. It doesn't so much bother me that she's taking up for him as the fact that she needs to. He's been actually nice lately, and now he's suddenly...

No. I'm not going to take this. I can't handle his back and forth. One day he's alright, and the next he's..... this.

He's sitting in the library reading the same book he's been reading.

"Take it back." My tone comes out clearly. Determined but with no heat. He doesn't look up. "You had no right to talk to me like that. Take it back." He only turns a page. "There was no reason to waste the food, and there was no reason to talk to me like that. I did

nothing to you. Take it back."

"Potter. Go away. You are making yourself a nuisance."

"Tell me what I did!" He continues to read. He looks exhausted. Under his eyes are dark shadows.

"Sevey sleepy." Wendy says yawning. She comes into the room and crawls into the sour man's lap. "Sevey no sleep. Wen Wen sleepy too. Sevey no sleep, wen wen no sleep." She whines. He lays his hand on top of her head. She seems to lean into the touch.

"Niffy, will you lay Wendy down for a nap." Niffy pops in and immediately leaves with the young elf in her arms. "Potter, we will not be having occlumency lessons today. Practice on your own today." He momentarily lays the book down and looks at me straight on. "I do not want to see you again for the remainder of the day."

"I'm not moving." I can feel my anger bubbling. "You've been mostly human since I started living here. You've even been nice. And suddenly you are back to acting like a git. I'm not moving until you tell me why you are suddenly so angry with me." He stands in front of me. I fight down the memory of the dream from the night before. That thought has no place in this conversation.

He towers over me. His features are held firm like steel. He won't budge. I know he won't.

"Potter."

"You had called me by my given name a few times. Why am I back to Potter now?" I don't mean to sound upset, but I can't help it. I'm more surprised about how he actively flinches at my tone. "I thought we were actually to the point where we could talk to each other respectfully. I've tried to respect your boundaries. I know I haven't done perfect, but I've tried." I watch his hand lay over his left forearm.

"I am being summoned." He walks past me as if I weren't blocking him. I'm angry with him. But I still don't want him to be hurt or

killed or found out.

"Will you be okay as exhausted as you are." I haven't turned to look at him, but I hear his footsteps stop.

"You do not have to worry about me Potter." Actually, I do. But I don't argue with him.

I try not to worry when I watch him apparate away. How could I not worry though? He's going into danger and as much as I still want to be angry at him... I know somewhere under that thick layer of mean is a decent human being.

Is the bastard bipolar maybe?

Niffy returns to the room.

"Harry, breakfast is done." I still feel sick at the wasted food, but I fight it down. I move on autopilot. Eating the food with little interest.

"Niffy, does Snape normally have mood swings?" She stalls for a moment.

"Sevy has angry outburst depending on the situation. Most of the time, he is in complete control of his emotional state, but there are some things that set him off. Otherwise." She exhales. "Otherwise he has an ulterior reason for behaving a certain way."

"Niffy, he's keeping something from me, isn't he?"

"Harry. That is between you and Sevy. I believe when he is ready, he will tell you. Until then..." She looks away. "Please trust my master. He is loyal to you above anyone else. Sevy can be difficult, but he will only ever do what he thinks is best for you."

"I don't know if I believe you Niffy." The plate sits innocently in front of me. I've lost my appetite, but I will not waste this food as well.

"Sevy is very protective of you, but I think..." She doesn't finish her sentence.

"What do you think Niffy?" She smiles a thin small smile. Almost sad.

"Niffy would do well to not say. Niffy only hopes that you can help my master the way he always helps you." She bows politely and leaves to tend to her chores.

I eat slowly, more focused on my thoughts over the food in front of me. Maybe he was just cranky. He did look like he hadn't slept. He wouldn't blatantly be cruel like that would he. Something tells me he would.

When I finish eating, I put the plate in the sink and wash it by hand. When I'm done, I play a game of wizard chess on my own. I'm awful at it, but Snape still plays with me. He hasn't even mocked me about how bad I am.

The day is mostly boring.

It's nearly evening when one of the house elves, Zend comes into the living room with a bucket.

"Zend, what are you doing?" He doesn't respond. I haven't talked with him very much. He often keeps to him. "Zend? Do you need help with something?" The little elf turns to me.

"I..I.. am am am h...h...h...h....helping Brux." He leaves and I follow him. He and the other elves are going into the linen closet and gathering up a mountain of blankets and pillows.

"Niffy, what is going on." She clinches her jaw.

"Harry, you would want to go to your room for the remainder of the evening."

"Niffy." She exhales.

"Niffy cannot make you, but you will not like what you will be seeing. Sevy will be displeased at you knowing, but Niffy cannot stop to talk. Brux says Sevy will need help." The blind elf is carrying his own mountain of fabrics.

"Harry stay." He says. I can hardly hear him because his mouth is muffled by a large pillow. "We will need the extra hands mother. Zend, prepare as many potions as you can, to already have them. Wendy and I will wait for Sevy. Mother, please go to Hogwarts and find Poppy. We will need her. It will be more than Zend can do." The blind elf quickly orders everyone. "Harry, please stay with me. I will need you to be my eyes." Everyone quickly goes about the given orders, and Brux ushers me next to the growing pile of blankets and comforters and pillows.

"Brux, is something going to happen." He only nods. Zend comes carrying in several vials.

"I.. I.. h. hope thi..this will will b... be enough."

"It will suffice until Poppy arrives. Wendy."

"Yes!"

"You know what to do?"

"Yes! Wen Wen knows!" She nods confidently.

"What exactly do I need to do?" I ask. Brux reaches out and touches me arm.

"You will know."

It feels like we are waiting next to the mountain hours when I hear the telling sound of someone apparating. Everything after that feels like it happened in moments. Snape stumbles forward just an arm's length away, and I manage easily enough to catch him. He fights me. Desperately he pushes away from me till I can't keep him upright. And he's laying on the makeshift bed the elves made for him. He's heaving painfully, and Wendy holds the bucket under his mouth while gently rubbing his head. Zend is pouring potions directly on his skin. I've only just now noticed that he's bare from the waist up.

Old and new scars crisscross unpleasantly across the expanse of his back. And his chest. His arms are shaking to hold himself up even just to dry heave into the bucket. So I wrap my arm under him to

help. Because I don't know what else to do.

Sometimes Zend will lift his chin up and force Snape to swallow a potion or another. Snape never throws up, but he gags the entire time. I wouldn't imagine that there's anything in his stomach to throw up. I know he's conscious because in-between in screaming and gagging, he pushes me away. Or glares at me. He doesn't want me here, but I can't bring myself to leave.

I can clearly see all of his ribs through his thin pale skin. Tears of pain seem to prick his eyes.

I've never been so happy to see Poppy. She arrives and is in immediate mediwitch mode. She rolls him on his back even as he fights her. Her wand is waved around him. A few more potions are given. He thrashes and Wendy strokes his hair the entire time. I don't know what to do. I feel useless.

He starts settling down fitfully into a painful sleep. It's only at this point that she turns to me.

"Are you in any pain dearie?" Me?

"No. I'm fine. I wasn't injured. It's professor Snape who's the hurt one." Her eyes narrow at me confusedly.

"Yes dear, but you and Severus are bonded correct? Are you not feeling his pain?"

Chapter 15: Poppy explains

She's looking at me. Her eyes narrowed in confusion. Niffy is looking guiltily away.

"Harry dear, you are bonded to Severus." I know it's a close secret, but it's obvious that she knows. "Right. You and I will talk after Severus is comfortably in bed." She waves her wand and he easily floats. He thrashes for a moment, but she doesn't look surprised. "Stubborn boy. You can't expect to singlehandedly take on everything." She's shaking her head chastisingly at him. "It's clear you are running yourself ragged." I walk closely to her as she enters his room with a level of confidence that says she's done this too many times. She eases him into bed and devoids him of clothing. I look away if only to preserve his modesty. She on the other hand begins searching threw drawers until she finds what she wants. With ease she dresses him and when I turn around, she is easing the blanket over him. She pours a vile of what looks to be dreamless sleep down his throat.

A searing pain feels like it's being etched into my bones. I have to fight to keep from buckling to the ground. Poppy notices, but doesn't pull away from Snape yet. She smooths his hair down. "Wendy sweetheart. Where are you?" She calls sweetly. The elf peaks around a corner, looking into the room. "Could you be a sweetie and take a nap with Sevy?" She nods enthusiastically.

"Wen wen will look after Sevy!"

"I know you will sweet girl." Poppy taps my arm as she leaves the room. Before I pull away from the sight of the sallow man on the bed, I watch mesmerized as Wendy crawls next to him. She cuddles against him as if he were some life-sized teddy bear. She doesn't at all look hesitant.

I find Poppy in the empty Library. She is sitting in the seat I normally take, so I take Snape's. His thick scent immediately over takes my senses and I'm reminded of the pain deep in my bones that

I still feel. She reaches over with a vial.

"You may wish to take this. I can imagine that you are in pain now, correct?" I immediately drink the contents down needing this pain to dissipate even if only a little. "I am assuming that you know nothing?"

"No. I don't." She nods. Then turns to the head elf.

"Niffy, might you bring us some tea? I would be very grateful." Reluctantly she disappears to retrieve the asked for drink.

"Poppy, can you please..." She holds up her hand.

"We will wait until Niffy returns."

"You know about the elves." I say instead. She nods thoughtfully.

"Yes. It was very important to Severus that the existence of his elves remain secret. Especially little Wendy's. You may not be aware, but a house elf without magic is considered useless. They are more often than not killed. The existence of one Is very rare, but they are not typically granted a long life. Because of this, and the nature of his other elves, very few have had the privilege of meeting them."

"Snape must really trust you." I say lightly. She laughs.

"Yes, Severus does indeed trust me completely."

"How did you... get him to... trust you like that." I'm not sure why I'm asking or why I want to know. She closes her old aged eyes for a moment in thought.

"I did the absolute unthinkable." She says laughing all the while. "I defended a Slytherin student." She actually rolls her eyes. "The school is much to divided. A person in the right is in the right no matter what house they are aligned with. My first year as a medi-witch at Hogwarts, there was this little awkward Slytherin boy that always seemed to get into trouble. This group of Gryffindor boys put him in my beds more often than I can even recall. Most of the time the injuries were minor. Once though. He was attacked by a werewolf at the school." She looks at me knowingly. "That boy was

unfortunately at the wrong place at the wrong time. He was way to curious. Still. It didn't matter how close his life came to being forfeit. He received all of the blame while the guilty party was more or less ignored." She exhales. "I have also tended to Severus's wounds many times. I've earned his trust through years of kindness. He is not an easy man to sway, but once he trusts you, once he cares for you, he will do anything in his power for that person's safety and happiness. Every student that has ever entered my medical wing is in my care. Regardless."

"Your tea." Niffy says handing a cup to Poppy and then to me.

"Niffy, is there anything you would like to say?" The house elf remains silent. "Niffy, you are a great house elf, and I know your primary goal is to please your master, but you do realize that doing as he desires may not benefit him in the long run. Young Harry may seem brash," Poppy looks at me, "and there are many things he doesn't understand, but I believe he has a right to know about this bond that he is apart of." Niffy looks away again.

"Master is very... scared of this bond."

"I'm sure he Is Niffy. Maybe young Harry can help us alleviate that some." The two lock eyes and seem to have an unspoken conversation. Then the house elf nods.

"I will trust that you have my master's best in mind." Poppy smiles gently.

"I always do Niffy. Harry." She turns to me. "This pain you are feeling, I'm sure you understand that it's not yours. You are feeling a muted version of whatever Severus feels. You claim that you have not been feeling pain that comes and goes suddenly?"

"I have... But it never lasts for long. I just thought... I don't know what I thought." Poppy nods at my answer.

"If I had to guess, I would say that Severus who is known to be skilled in occlumency has been shielding you. The effect on one's body is transferred to the bond mate as well. Strong thoughts. Dreams are often a common one." She turns to Niffy. "It is clear that

Severus is sleeping even less regularly than normal."

"Yes. Master did not want Harry to possibly see a dream. He has slept as little as he possibly can."

"I can equally understand why Severus may have not wanted you to know. You would not like him seeing so easily nightmares that we both know you have. Or any strangeness your body may experience. Severus is a very private man. He doesn't wish to share and he doesn't wish to be shared with. It is just how he is."

"Um. Are you saying that he can see any dream?"

"No. I'm saying he can see all of your dreams. Just as you can see his. Severus cannot shield his mind when he is unconscious, so I can only surmise that the few times you've felt that phantom pain was when he lost consciousness." He's seen my dreams. He's seen *that* dream. "Severus is very skittish by nature. He would seek to protect his weak points first. Hiding anything that can make him look week. And that isn't even bringing up the Death eater meetings." She actually shivers.

This is humiliating. He knows about that stupid dream. I don't think I can look him in the eyes again. It's no wonder he was acting so... elusive. He was trying not to let on that he knew about. Damn it that dream was too vivid.

"You and he will have to learn to work together. I know that both of you have started, but as a bonded pair, there will be many differences that you two will have to overcome."

"We only have to make it until the war and then Snape said he could unbond us." She stands abruptly knocking the tea onto the group. Her face is twisted in righteous fury. And all of the fury is focused on me. I look to Niffy for help. Or an explanation. What did I do?

"You will not ask Severus to break the bond." Her tone is threatening. Daring me to go against her. She's searching my face, and in the next moment hers softens. "You don't know what that would entail do you?" She asks breathlessly. "You have no idea

what he would have to sacrifice. You weren't told. Dumbledore and Severus knew you wouldn't agree if you knew, so they kept it from you with half baked lies."

"Poppy, I don't understand what you mean."

"Harry Potter. Dear. Bonds are seldom used because of how unbreakable they are. Most conventional wizards and witches do not use them because the option of leaving is all but void. There are two types of bonds that two magical folk will enter into. The first is the most common. It unites them in body. The mind can still change. And the bond can be broken. And then there is the one that you entered into with Severus. It is a bond of the soul. The stronger the bond the more damaging it is to leave it. You and he are both strong wizards." She's pacing frantically. Niffy is looking at her feet in shame. "To ask him to break the bond. At best, all of his magic would be forfeit and he would have less magic than a squib. That's at best. At worse- and more likely in the case of you and Severus. In order to break the bond he would have to relinquish his own life."

Chapter 16: Call Me 'Harry'

He's sitting upright in his bed. His chest is bare except for the numerous bandages. A day with those potion-soaked bandages should be enough to have him back to... whatever his norm is. He's glaring at me. Waiting for me to say something to set him off. Waiting for me to condemn or judge him. Waiting for me to say anything. But I can't think of anything to say. It's all so much to process.

Poppy was adamant that Snape not be kept in the dark about my newfound knowledge. And as much as it makes the entire situation more awkward, I agreed with her. So, it's just me and him in a stare off, waiting for the other person to lead. I'm afraid to start off. I'm afraid to set him off. It's clear from his face that he doesn't want me around him while he's licking his wounds. He doesn't want me to know anymore about him than what he himself tells me. Unfortunately, he doesn't have that luxury anymore.

"There is no reason to break the bond once the war ends." I choke the words out. His eyes only narrow at me. "Had I known the repercussions before, I would have had the same stance. Like it or not, we are bonded together." His dark eyes stab into me. I find it easier to not look at him while I talk. He is an intimidating man. He's never scared me in the past, but somehow, I think I'm afraid of him now. Afraid to be hated. Or even liked for that matter. "If after the war you or I find someone that we desire to be with, then we can discuss what steps to take. I know that there is no one that I care to be with at this point in my life, but I know neither of us can talk about what may happen in the future. If you happen to find someone that you love, then I will not stand in the way. Obviously, they would have to be told that you and I are bonded, but I'm sure they will understand that it had to be done."

I chance a look at him. The only emotion on his face is indifferent anger.

"Potter." He starts. But he doesn't continue.

"Snape." I reply. He shakes his head and the anger is faded and replaced with something else.

"We will discuss what will happen after the war, once this war is finally over. If we both manage to live through it at least." He adds quietly at the end.

"Don't hold back anymore. Please." I say diving in to the deep end. His eyes are again narrowed. "You haven't been sleeping. I guess you didn't want me to see any of your dreams."

"Dreamless sleep can be taken once every three days without any ill effects. Rest assured, even before we were bonded, I did not sleep every night." I look away from him again.

"I wont bring up any of your dreams that I see, if you don't bring up mine." I try to force my body language to not be awkward, but I don't know how successful I am. "I have nightmares sometimes that I wouldn't want anyone to know about. You already know things about me that I would prefer no one know." His eyes soften, then immediately harden again as if he realized he was showing kindness. "I know that you aren't evil. And I know you aren't a bad guy. Everyone that trusts you says that you behave how you feel you have to."

He remains silent.

"Please. Don't be mean to me." I feel like a child begging his bully for relief. "I don't care what your reason is. We can work through our differences. And please." My stomach feels sick. "Don't waste that much food again. I can't..." I feel like I could throw up. "I can't stand it." He exhales.

"I know. That's why I did it." His hand clinches the blanket. His eyes stare blankly ahead, focused on nothing. "Potter. The reason you are alive is because of me."

"I know that you've saved my hide a lot of times but..."

"No." He cuts me off. "The reason you are 'the boy who lived' is because of me. The reason you are an orphan and the reason you

lived that night."

"I lived because my mother loved me!"

"You lived because she was given the choice." He says. "I was once a member of the death eaters because I thought it was where I belonged. I had nothing. Except a friendship. You know that Lily and I were friends." I nod. "There was a period of my life where I felt alone. Even my closest friend was leaving me. So I made a mistake. In those times, I mostly was an informant. I searched for information. But honestly my heart wasn't in the so called 'cause'." He shakes his head. "I cannot say that I was ever against muggles and certainly I wasn't against muggle born witches. But I fell into the honey pot. A group that thought I held value. I was a lonely child and it certainly didn't take much for me to sell my soul." He's looking up at the ceiling. In thought. "My talents were primarily stealth. Brewing potions naturally, but I was also skilled at gathering information. I overheard part of a prophecy."

I don't dare speak for fear of closing him off again. So I remain silent. Waiting for him to speak. Waiting for his next word.

"I honestly didn't believe the prophecy. After all is was said by Trelawney. I still question if that woman is a loon. I was already reluctant in my role, but the most harm that could be done was some random family be killed. I had already stained my hands so much, that it hardly mattered anymore. I later learned that Lily's child was the one in the prophecy. I told the dark lord the information that caused him to target my only friend." He exhales. "I begged him. I begged him to spare Lily. If no one else. Spare her because I was his loyal follower. And because he is fond of me, he gave her the choice. She could live or she could die along side her son." He looks at me. "You know which she chose. But the reason you lived was because she had the choice. Whereas your father and many other parents did not." He's not looking at me. His face is blank. I'm not even sure how I feel about that information.

"Snape."

"I swore to protect Lily's child at the cost of my own life. There is nothing worthwhile about my existence, and I've tired of living

anyways. After the war, if I even manage to survive it, I will likely be sent to Azkaban. And even if I am not. I've grown tired of living. I would not have said that I would end the bond unless I meant to. You will not be bonded to me after the war. It is hardly a sacrifice on my part so much as sweet relief. Now. Get out of my room." His words hold no heat. I can't move my legs.

Does he really feel that low about himself? Where death is a comfortable alley. I've dealt with a lot. More than I even let on. There are days that I hate waking up, but I've never truly wanted to die. There is a lot of bad in the world, but there is a lot of good too. Does he truly not believe that anymore.

"I said get out." I still can't move. "Potter. You will leave now." I'm trying to figure out why I can't move my legs to leave then it clicks. I don't want to leave like this. I don't want to just let him have the last word if it's about killing himself. I don't want him thinking that he has that option.

"No." I find my Gryffindor courage. "I'm not leaving. We aren't done talking."

"Yes we are, get out." His voice drips venom.

"I am not done so I am not leaving. And right now, you are to injured to leave. This is probably my only chance to talk to you without you storming off and I'm going to take it."

"Get out!" He throws a pillow and it hits me right in the chest. I'm just thankful nothing heavy is within arms length of him.

"Snape. Just listen to me for a moment."

"There is nothing you have to say that I need to hear."

"My mom wouldn't want you to kill yourself." His eyes are fiery rage.

"You never even knew Lily. Do not speak as if..."

"I know I didn't. But you did! Do you really think she would want that for you." He's dying down. "We have to trust each other. You

have to rely on me and I have to rely on you. I know there are things you do not want me to know!" He's grabbing another pillow. "And there are things I don't want you to know. I have nightmares. Nightmares where I hear my mother screaming." It makes me sick. I haven't had them since I've been staying here, but I use to have them nightly." The pillow is held tightly in his hand. "There are things I don't want anyone to know. But I trust you. I know if you act moody or angry you have a reason. I'm trying to be understanding. I'm trying to not push, but I can't help it! You refuse to lean on me. You refuse to rely on me even though it was you who said we needed to trust each other. I'm doing my part!"

"Potter."

"Severus." I challenge. His name feels so odd on my tongue. Like a foreign language. His eyes are killing. "If you can let your elves call you 'Sevey' then your bond mate should be able to call you by your first name." I say simply. "Don't you agree Severus." I say again. It doesn't sound as odd the second time.

"Leave Potter."

"Harry. My first name is Harry."

"Potter. You will leave now."

"'Harry, I would like you to leave'" I say. The knuckles of his hands are white. His dark eyes are seething.

"Potter."

"Harry." I say. "I will leave when you ask me to leave. Not when you ask the idea you have of me. I'm not my father. I have been respectful to you. And I am still trying to be respectful. We are bond mates. We have to trust each other." He won't say my name. I'm not sure if it's because of pride or something else. "It's just a name Severus."

"Stop talking!"

"Just ask me to leave and I will. I'm not trying to upset you. I've never liked the way you call me Potter. It's like you're blaming me

for everything my father did." His hands are holding the pillow firmly. I can tell he's contemplating throwing it at me. "It reminds me of the way my uncle would call me boy. Like I don't deserve a real name. I don't like it. I'm trying to be honest with you. I've never told anyone about that." I don't like feeling vulnerable. His hand releases the pillow and it's like his body has turned to liquid.

"Go away Harry." He's not looking at me.

"Yes sir. Try to get some rest Severus. I'll check on you later."

Chapter 17: Getting Closer

Since Severus has recovered, he's been coldly ignoring me as much as he can. We practice occlumency, defense spells, but the remainder of the time, he ignores me. Sometimes he's sitting inside the forbidden room upstairs. I saw him and immediately left him be. My weakness is respecting boundaries. I'm trying to do better. Who ever 'Princess' was, was special and it's clearly still a sensitive topic. So I'll leave him alone about it.

He doesn't look quite as yellow, I think he's actually sleeping more regularly. I know he has. I've seen some of his dreams. I've not commented on any of them. I think it's best for now if we both pretend I can't see his nightmares. He never seems to have good dreams.

Today, he's actually in his lab brewing. His hair looks greasy today, but I know now that it's the protective potions he puts in his hair. He's ignoring me while I watch him brew. There is something about the way he moves that is unnaturally graceful. Chopping or dicing ingredients with ease. A gentle sway of hips as he moves. Focused on only his potion. His hands are stained, but I can't stop looking at them. It's fascinating the way those long fingers grip confidently on a knife or wand. On the stirring stick. The muggle clothes he wears while at home, flatter his lanky body better than the ominous robes. Not that the robes are bad, but it makes him look harsher than he really is.

"Harry, is there any reason you are ogling me." He says snidely. His dark eyes are cutting into me.

"I just noticed that you look a lot more attractive when you are relaxed." Why did I say that. Why did I say that! Stupid impulsive mouth. His mouth twists harshly.

"You will not mock me Potter." His tone is threatening. Damn it.

"I wasn't mocking you I swear! I was just talking out loud. I didn't

even mean to say that. You just never look relaxed. This is the first time I've seen you like this." I can tell that every muscle in his body is tense. "Severus, I wasn't mocking you." Why do I always talk when I should stay quiet? He tilts his head inspecting me. "It was a compliment. Or I meant it as a compliment at least." Sometimes tell me that he isn't accustomed to receiving compliments, and certainly not about his looks. "Why do you want to be the defense again dark arts professor so badly, it looks like you actually enjoy potions." It's no secret among everyone at Hogwarts that Professor Snape has been trying to get the teaching job for years.

"Potions hold little value in the war. True enough, healing droughts and the like are important, but it is more likely that my students will be under curses and jinxes, and they will need to know how to combat them. Most of the DADA teachers have been piss poor at best. Some more evil then even the dark lord." Umbridge. My hands still have faint scars from her 'detentions.' Last year, Severus wasn't necessarily bad. I do wonder though if he held back so that he would not look suspicious to the dark lord. When he left the school after his failed attempt at 'killing the headmaster', I honestly felt betrayed. Dumbledore trusted him, and I honestly thought he was trying to kill the headmaster and he just happened to have failed.

"I know we never really talked about it, but your potions textbook. The fact that you were, well are the half blood prince. The way you explained things in there were much easier to understand than in the potions classroom. You should write a textbook." I wring my hands together. He exhales.

"I have. No one will publish a textbook written by a death-eater. As for that old textbook of mine. I owned it during a dark time in my life. Many of those spells," He looks at me pointedly, "were not intended for use outside of war. I was fascinated with dark arts from a purely educational point of view. If one is willing to use dark means, they can accomplish everything. But Harry. Everything has a price. When Lily died, I researched any way to bring her back." He exhales. Then he laughs. It's not a pleasant laugh though. It's bitter. And angry. "There was a way. It likely would have worked. But the price was much to high. And Lily would not have wanted to live under those circumstances."

"What... what was the price." I shouldn't ask. It's clear I will not like the answer. He only laughs more.

"Forgive my paraphrasing, it was written in Latin and far to complicated to repeat. Suffice to say, I could have brought her back, if I killed you." He laughs bitterly. "Here I am, reading this old tome searching for any way to bring my only friend back to life. My only friend that choose her sons life over hers and I find that the only way is to kill the person she died protecting. If it were any life for hers, then I could have accomplished it. I had already realized that her living was worth so much more than me." He shakes his head.

"It wasn't your fault. Not really. It was Voldemort's."

"Don't say his name Harry." He sounds exhausted. "Believe me when I say that I searched for any way to right my wrongs. But somethings cannot be fixed." I'm not sure what I should do; so, I do the only thing I can think of. I hug him. He just remains stiff in my embrace, but I can't think of anything to do. He's hurting. I suppose he hurts a lot. But I can't help him.

"It's in the past." He doesn't say anything. "Right now, we need to focus on how to survive the present so that we can make it to the future." I let him go and he at least looks calmer. "I wonder who Dumbledore intends to bring in as potions and DADA professor." Severus rubs his temple.

"I have no idea. The headmaster isn't exactly prone on letting anyone else in on his plans." The silence is building between us and though it's not completely awkward, I feel like I should say something.

"Thank you for saving me from Quirrell during my first Quidditch match. I found out at the end of that year, but I never thank you. And thank you during my second year for indirectly teaching me expelliarmus, even though you didn't intentionally teach it to me, I has been a very useful spell to me. And third year, even though Sirius wasn't really trying to kill me, you thought he was, and you protected me then. Forth year, you rescued me from the imposter, and then fifth year with Umbridge. She wanted you to give her truth serum to use on me. But you said that you did not have any.

I'm sure you were lying. You never let any of your stores go empty... And then you saved me when my relatives house was raided. I know you've saved me even more times than I know, and I know that I haven't thanked you for any of those times. I'm sorry and thank you."

"I did not do it for you Potter."

"Harry." I say. "And it doesn't matter what your reason is. I'm still thankful. So thank you Severus." He turns back to his potion. I'm not sure if he is ignoring me, or just doesn't want to think about what I've said. He deserves to be thanked.

"Tomorrow, you will be going to Hogwarts. Get your class list and get out of this house for a few hours, I'm sure that will aid in recovering your sanity."

"What?"

"I said that you are going to Hogwarts tomorrow. As crazed as you sound, you no doubt need to see your friends."

"But. Are you sure that it's safe to do that?"

"I have intended for you to visit them for a while, tomorrow will be the best day for you to do that."

"Why tomorrow?" He turns back to his potion and ignores me. When I ask him again, he doesn't so much as twitch. Maybe I should be frustrated with him, but I'm just really looking forward to seeing my friends.

Chapter 18: Happy Birthday

"Are you sure it's alright for me to see my friends." I ask Snape-Severus now.

"Yes P... Harry. You will be perfectly safe at Hogwarts for a few hours. We cannot do this regularly, so make this visit with your insufferable friends count." It's been so long since I've seen then or spoken to them. "It is imperative that you do not tell them the nature of our relationship." He says the last word with a scoff. "You are merely staying at a safe house in a location that you are unsure of."

"Right."

"I am serious Harry. If your friends have information about your whereabouts, then they will only be that much more of a target from the dark lord. As such, Niffy is accompanying you to ensure that you do not lose your tongue." I laugh lightly at that. "She is also accompanying you for extra protection- one can never be to careful after all." When I laugh again he looks at me seriously. "I would not doubt her Harry." He actually smiles. "I would sooner go up against the dark lord himself then try to hurt someone that Niffy has decided to protect."

"Niffy will make sure that Harry comes back safely and all in one piece." She assures.

"I will open up the floo, Niffy, I expect both of you back by five." That gives me almost four hours with them. I haven't been able or allowed to owl them other than that one letter I handed off to Dumbldore. This will be my first contact with them in what feels like forever. I've wanted to talk with them for so long. I knew it wasn't feasible though. It was actually Severus who set this up. He told me if I wanted to see my friends he could arrange it. I'm thankful for it.

The two of them have been staying at Hogwarts. Both of their

families have aurors watching their home at all times to protect their family, and it's not lost on me that Severus is the one who set that up too. I didn't even think that they might would be targeted.

When I walk into the great hall, Hermione immediately embraces me, then Ron clasps me on the back.

"We've been worried sick. When the headmaster said that we would get to see you today, we were so excited." Ron says. "Didn't think we were ever going to hear from you."

"There's just been a lot going on, and I'm not able to communicate with the outside world while I'm in hiding." Hermione looks to the elf quietly at my side.

"Harry, who is this."

"This is Niffy. She is the house elf at the safe house that I've been staying at."

"Niffy is pleased to make your acquaintance." She says politely. Both openly look at her. I forget that she's severely physically disabled. I'm so use to it now that I don't even think about it.

"Harry! I can't believe you are taking advantage of a house elf. What about S.P.E.W.!"

"'mione, I promise, I'm not taking advantage of Niffy."

"Harry, we should free her at once." Niffy hold up her hand.

"Niffy is already a free elf. Niffy has been free for a long time, but indulge me miss. Niffy enjoys taking care of her masters."

"You shouldn't have to care for any master though. You deserve..."

"Miss, please do not speak for Niffy. Niffy is very happy." I can't hold back from actually laughing

"Just save it for another elf 'mione, this one appears all set." Rom pipes in.

"Sorry Niffy, Hermione means well." I say lightly. Niffy nods.

"Yes yes, Gryffindor's often do." She smiles at me. "Niffy will sit and wait until Harry is ready to leave. Simply tell Niffy if you are needing anything." She sits down a few seats away. Close enough to keep an eye on me, but far enough away to give us some privacy. Hermione hands me my schedule. Trust her to already have it for me.

"Harry you should get the books for your classes soon. It's never to early to start studying."

"I will soon 'mione. I haven't really gotten a chance yet." I know she means well, but school is the least of my problems.

"He's still got two weeks until term. No need to rush out."

"You would do well ordering yours as well Ron."

The conversation is easy and comfortable. I've missed this.

We spend an hour just talking about everything. Classes. Supplies. Gossip. It's comfortable, but I knew that we wouldn't stay on safe topics forever.

"Harry, what really happened. Why is it that you are no longer at your aunts?" Hermione asks. She held off longer than I thought she would.

"All I can really say is that the bond that was keeping me safe there, broke. I can't say anything else. Is there anything new going on with you two?" They look directly at each other having an unspoken conversation. I hate those. I hate being out of the loop. I hate not being on equal footing.

"Harry, uh. Ron and I..." She motions to him.

"Hermione and I are officially dating."

"Congratulations." I say. And I mean it. I really do. I'm happy for my friends. Ron seems a bit more relaxed.

"Ginny has been asking about you like crazy." Yea. Ginny. I forgot there was a brief period that I liked her. "If you and my sis got together, we could double date. And if we all got married, we would all be family. Like officially." Ron says excitedly. Niffy is looking directly at me.

"Sorry Ron, I'm already..." I can't really say in a relationship. They will want to know who. I can't tell them who."

"You're already what?" Hermione asks. "Are you in a relationship with someone?" She always did catch on fast.

"Yea. Sorta. I can't really talk about it, but once I can, I promise you two will be the first I tell." Why do I want to tell them? I know how they feel about Severus. Honestly between Severus and Ginny at least one of them understands basic social etiquette. One of them is a lot closer to my age. Has more things in common with me. Actually likes me. Still. Maybe it's the bond or the prolonged exposure to Severus, but I think much higher of him than I use too. I actually worry about him. I would even say (only in the safety of my mind of course) that I care for him. Not love. Merlin no. Not love. But. Something.

I would like for the old greasy bat to be happy. After recent events, it looks like the closest he will get to that will be with me. It's been tense since Poppy spilled the secret. Severus has more or less refused to talk about it since then, but he calls me by my first name- most of the time. And I have to think that that is an improvement. So, I would like for Severus to be happy. He deserves it.

However that can be accomplished.

"Can you tell us anything about her?" Ron asks. I try to think of something that can pacify them for now. Niffy is intently paying attention.

"I can say that she isn't a she." I say tentatively. Both Ron and Hermione look back and forth at each other.

"Harry, are you a poof?" Ron asks seriously. I never really thought about how they would respond to the thought of me being with a

guy.

"No. Yes. I don't really know. I don't think it matters much." I say honestly.

"Does he at least treat you right Harry?" Hermione saves the situation.

"Honestly, he's kind of hard to understand. We haven't been together that long. I don't really know as much about him as I'd like too. He has a pretty thick wall and he doesn't seem to like the idea of anyone getting to know him, at least not easily." From the way I described him, I can tell Ron and 'mione are concerned. "He treats me like a person. I like that." I say. And it's true. I do like how Severus treats me like I'm the same as everyone else. But I also don't. I need to feel like I'm special to certain people. Not because I'm the boy who lived.. but because.. they care about me.

A flash of pain goes up my spine, and I can't keep from doubling over. The pain is replaced with an overwhelming amount of pleasure. It isn't a pleasant pleasure though. It's a torturous stimulation overload kind of pleasure. Is Severus okay. I'm really worried now. It comes and goes in waves. We couldn't have been gone for more than an hour.

"Harry are you alright." Hermione's hand is on my shoulder.

"I'm alright. It's just been a long day. Niffy, I think it's best if we go back a little early." This pain and then pleasure and then pain again will not cease. It's unbearable. My friends are concerned. I understand. But I'm fine. "Niffy, we have to go back now." She shakes her head.

"Yes, please say your goodbyes." Both of them hug me, and each of them pulls a wrapped present from their robes to give to me.

"The house elves were going to be bringing up a cake soon. We had hopped to surprise you." Today... it's my birthday. "Happy birthday Harry." Hermione and Ron both hug me.

"We will see you when term starts. Please feel better." Hermione

says to me worriedly. "Or maybe you should see Poppy?" She suggests.

"No, I think I just need to rest. Niffy and I should be getting back soon anyways. Thank you. Both of you." I have to see if Severus is okay.

Chapter 19: He Needs Me

I'm pacing. I can't calm down. I'll occasionally feel a searing pain shoot up my back before it vanishes. It hurts so bad. He's still not back. Niffy is sitting watching me pace. She's tried to calm me. Assure me that him being gone for long lengths is normal. But he still isn't back. I refuse to lie to myself. Of course, I'm concerned. Of course, I'm worried. I feel sick. Like I could throw up at any moment. I feel like I need to throw up. And I can only guess that it's because he feels that way.

In the same spot as before, a mountain of bedding has been laid down. For when he apparates back I'm sure.

Brux is sitting next to the mountain staring at it blindly. "I don't know when he will be back Harry." He says quietly but clearly. "I can see flashes of what will happen, but I am not all knowing. I know he will be hurt. I know he will need help. But I cannot see when it will happen." Niffy lovingly touches his head.

"You are doing your best." She says encouraging. Zend is beside his brother already prepared with potions.

"I need a distraction." I say more to myself. Little Wendy grabs my hand and pulls me down on the floor.

"Wen wen has been here second longest!" She says proudly.

"I don't understand what you mean Wendy." She tilts her head then looks over at the other elves.

"She means Harry, that she was the second elf that Sevey took in. I was the first. Then Wendy, then Brux, then Zend." Niffy says while easing gently on the ground as well. "For each of us, Sevey was instructed to kill us. We had no use to the wizard families we were once apart of. Wendy was a newborn at the time. Only a few days old when Sevey took her in. He told me that she was to be my daughter." Niffy smiles lovingly at the smallest of the three house

elves. "I was never able to have any children of my own. I was unable. Because of that, I have always had a fondness for little ones." She looks sadly down at the floor. "And that also went for the little ones of the wizard family I was once part of."

"Niffy?" She looks up at me.

"That's how I was injured like this. I got between the wee little one and a werewolf. The wizard family I was part of, followed that horrible man that Sevey is with right now. They displeased that horrible man and as punishment, he threw their baby to some werewolf that was working with him. I was ordered to allow the atrocity. I couldn't." She touches her mangled leg. "I loved that baby. I'm sure somewhere I still do. I believe that the mother at least was thankful, but still. They had no need for a useless elf. They asked Sevey to 'dispose' of me. So. He did. In his own way."

"What was the family?"

"The Malfoys. But it was a very long time ago. Sevey still watches over little Draco for me. I'm sure he has no knowledge of the house elf that loved him like her own, but that was a very long time ago."

"Draco Malfoy." I say more to myself. He was loved by this elf so much that she was willing to die to keep him safe.

"I'm still not sure what possessed Sevey to save me. But I can guess. That was shortly after your mother protected you. Maybe because I did something similar it stood out to him. He mostly left me to my vices. Ignored me more like." She laughs lightly. "He was just a wizard that opened his home for me, I knew nothing of him." Her eyes are cloudy. "And then Princess. Little Princess." She shakes her head. "All of the life in this home surfaced with her, and then left with her. I didn't think I would ever see my master smile again. I didn't think he would recover. He became so bitter. So angry. I cannot blame him for it." Princess again. She seems to be a reoccurring theme that is never really talked about even though everyone seems to know about her. Except for me.

"Then Sevey adopted Wen Wen!" Wendy says excitedly. She holds out her hands to indicate something small. "Wen Wen was only this

big." Her smiles is large.

"Yes, little Wendy." Niffy pats the small head again. "Sevey stood holding her as if she was the something that was missing. I still think it's because of her name. I'm sure it reminded him of his own Princess. How could he not love this one too." Niffy looks almost sad. "Sevey has had to fight for any happiness. Everything has been taken. Wendy, Brux, and Zend are secrets. No one can know. Because Sevey needs them."

Wendy jumps up excitedly. "Sevey has Harhar too!" Little Wendy sits on my lap. "Wendy likes Harhar." She's smiling at me with large eyes. Her pointed ears twitch and it's to adorable to not melt. I'm sure she's part of the reason Severus is so soft here. It's hard to be harsh under this much love.

"I really like it here. It actually feels like I'm part of a family." The strange thing is, I really feel that way. All of us. Including Severus. He's a git. Sure enough. A bastard at times as well. But. I want him to be happy. We are stuck with each other. Most likely for the remainder of both of our lives. He isn't going to break the bond. I just can't let him do that. "I like you too Wendy. I like all of you very much." Wendy smiles at me.

The pain hasn't left. Not fully. It occasionally surfaces then fades back. I hate it, but at least I know he's alive. Hurting unbearably but alive. I don't want him to go back. He's putting himself in unnecessary danger. I don't want Severus to keep putting himself in danger.

I watch Brux bite the side of his mouth. He's in thought, questioning something, but not ready just yet to say it out loud. When he stands all eyes are on him.

"Wendy. Can you help me organize the books in Sevey's lab. He would like to have it done for when he gets back." She nods excitedly, clearly happy to help. Then remembering that the other elf can't see she shouts.

"Yes! Wen Wen help!"

"Good. You go first, I will be right there." She's taking the stairs, but before Brux follows after her he pauses. "He will not want to be seen by anyone. Harry, please. Just." The elf grasps his arms together in a protective manner. "Don't leave him alone and don't hurt him. We are all very fond of him."

"I don't understand. What should I do to help him?" Brux shakes his head.

"Zend, explain how to use the potions to Harry and then you should come help as well. Mama and Harry can handle this on their own. I think... I hope." He doesn't sound very sure of himself. Regardless, he leaves.

I try to pay excellent attention to Zend's instructions. What potion goes first, what is ingested and what is applied externally. I pay attention because it's important. I pay attention because I need to be able to help him. I need to be someone that he can lean on. I have to grow up. I have to be someone that isn't just protected. I'm Seventeen.

Once Zend leaves, Niffy and I wait in quiet. I don't pace the floor like before though. I stay calm. I try to practice occlumency while I can. I try to stay calm. I try to not worry. I try to stay calm. I feel like I'm holding my breath until I hear the familiar sound of someone apparateing. And then the not so familiar sound of him screaming.

On the ground. Clothes mostly torn. Curled into a pitiful fetal position. Screaming. His eyes are twisted shut and his knees pulled up almost to his chest. Immediately I move.

I'm smearing potions over any injury I can and forcing him to drink down the various liquids. Even as he screams terrifyingly at me. Even as he pushes me away. Even as he screams and begs for me to not touch him. I push on. Because I know he's not screaming at me. Because I know he needs me to be calm right now. He needs me to be calm and to take care of him.

He needs me to act as though I can't see the blood staining the back of his pants.

He needs me.

He needs me.

Chapter 20: Awkward Shower

He's in my care. Stark naked and dripping under the spray of the shower. He's propped against the wall as I manually wash him. He's to drained to fight me. Or even say anything. Something similar to shame darkens his sharp features, but he doesn't have much choice. He's hard. I don't say anything about it. I'm fully dressed and soaked. I was not about to make the situation more uncomfortable for him, but he needs a good through cleaning. I can tell that's what he wants.

He always wants a shower when he gets back from the death eater meetings. Only this time he's not quite able to do it himself. He's spoken very little, but I have the feeling he was drugged. Given something to make him... respond. His legs are pressed tightly together in a futile attempt to hide himself.

Semen is leaking from his anus. He can hardly hold himself up even while using the wall.

"Severus." I say calmly. He deliberately looks away from me. Gently I squeeze his hand. "We have to clean inside you." He's shaking his head desperately while trying to back away from me. "Severus. It's okay. Lean against me. I'll hold you up while you..." I don't finish speaking. He pushes himself securely into the wall. His dark eyes are bloodshot and puffy. He's been crying. I swallow that thought down. "Severus. Please. Either you have to or I will. I know you want to be clean, and I know you don't want to rely on me, but I'm the one who's here. I'm not going to hurt you. I swear."

"I'll never be clean." He says so quietly that I can hardly hear him over the spray of the shower. My arms wrap tightly around him. I can feel his sharp bones digging jaggedly into me. I can feel his skin flushed and warm from arousal. I can feel his erection pressed between us, and I force my overactive hormones to die. Now is not the time for that.

"If you're dirty, then I'm dirty." I say as clearly into his ear as I can.

His body is shaking in my arms but I'm not really sure from which emotion. A muted half moan leaves his mouth just before he shamefully cums all over my shirt. Weak arms attempt to push me away, but I don't let him. "It's okay Severus. Don't worry about that right now. We need to get you clean. I know you don't want to be touched right now, but if you can't do it, then I will. And I know that means that you'll be angry with me. And I know that means that you may not trust me as much afterwards, but damn it. You can't just leave it in there. So, I'll hold you up. I know this is embarrassing for you, but I'll hold you up."

One of my arms goes under his and wraps around his middle, while the other rests against the back of his head. My fingers pat down his slick hair in a futile attempt to keep him calm. I fight down any semblance of desire that I may feel. I don't want to be aroused in this situation. I don't want to ever take advantage of him, but the way his fingers desperately dig into my shoulder and the way his narrow hips feverously press against me is tricking my 'other brain'. This is not him acting for sex, this is him drugged and ashamed. His other hand is reaching around, but he can't so much as insert a finger before he's screaming another release.

"I can't! I can't!" He screams on shaky knees.

"Severus. I know this is difficult, but..."

"I can't." He feels so small against me. Even though he's taller than me, he's found a way to curl into my neck. Both hands are on my shoulders, digging in if only to keep himself sane.

"How long will it last?" I ask him quietly. He's shaking his head.

"The effects can last for several days, but after twenty four hours, I can at least suppress it enough to control myself."

"I know you said that magic can't be used, but maybe..."

"Any invasive spells, including cleaning ones only negatively influence the potion. It was ingested anally, which makes it absorbed by the blood stream quicker. Spells will only make the situation worse." His back arches and his teeth are clinched tightly.

He seems to manage to fight this orgasm down at least. "Spells make it worse. I know that first hand." He shakes his head. I hate to think of him dealing with this own his own. At one point, he did.

"Severus, we have to clean you." I wrap my arms tightly around him. "Severus." His entire body is tense. "You know that I will not hurt you. Right?"

"Potter. If I'm touched, then my body will..."

"I know you don't have control right now."

"It's humiliating."

"I'm sorry Severus. If I do anything that hurts or makes you uncomfortable, then tell me and I'll stop. I'm just going to clean you."

"Potter. Being uncomfortable or hurt isn't what I'm worried about." His voice is quiet again.

"I'll do it as quickly as I can." I wait for him to nod. Well. This entire situation is awkward. "Alright Severus. I have you." He's tightly holding on to me. One of my hands is on the back of his head, and the other is just over his bum. "Severus. It's okay." My middle finger breaches the ring of muscles. He shivers and then presses against my leg before he can stop himself. "It's okay Severus. This will not take long." I try to not feel sick at the amount of semen leaking out of him now. The spray of the shower is rinsing most of it away. Gently I prod inside of him causing more of the insulting fluids to flow out of him and finally down the drain.

Honestly, I'm moving my finger very little and instead simply letting him headily rock against it. I don't say anything to him. Not hurting him is my first priority, and if he's cleaned out without feeling any discomfort, then that is preferable.

The sounds he is making are adorably arousing, and I have to remind myself why I'm in the shower with him. The foreign smells have been washed off of him, and he's back to smelling like himself. I notice less and less semen coming out of him until finally there's

none. I try to pull my finger out of him, but he only moans and presses back until it's inside of him again.

He's intoxicated. Drunk from the potion.

"Severus. We're done. You're clean inside." I don't have as much control as I need in this situation.

"It's good." He moans.

"Severus. You don't want this." He doesn't want this.

"Please. Inside." I can hear him crying. "Hurts. Need it inside."

"Severus." I'm trying to calm him, but it's so difficult to do that when he's lovingly grinding against me. I don't have the will power for this. I turn off the shower and he completely collapses against me. "I'm going to take you to your room." He looks up at me and his eyes are out of focused with need. "I'm going to take care of you Severus." He tilts his head.

"Take care?" He asks pressing against me. I can't push him off of me. He's to injured to stand on his own.

"Not like that Severus." I bite my bottom lip to refocus. "You and I are bonded. There are things I have to do that you don't like in order to help you, but. You don't want this." His head is tiredly laying on my chest.

"I do Harry." His voice is husky and meltingly submissive.

"Then we will talk about this when you are more stable. You have already told me that you don't have control over your actions; I will not take advantage of that." I grab a towel and lightly dry him off. His arm is pulled over me as I help him to his room.

Still semi damp, I lay him in his bed. Before I can find him clothing to put on, his hand weakly grabs my soaked shirt.

"Don't go." The desire from earlier isn't fully gone, but the primary tone has been replaced with something. Something that reminds me of loneliness. Isolation. Fear. "I don't want to be alone." He curls

into a tight ball. He looks ashamed of himself.

I think he's fighting himself. He's ashamed to be aroused and needy, but he is. He can't help it.

Gently I squeeze his hand.

"Severus. My clothes are soaked from the shower. I'm just going to borrow some of your clothes. I'll quickly change. I won't leave you, but I'm also not going to... take advantage of you." He's crying, but he's to tired to really seem to notice or care.

"I know Harry. T..thank you." And I could be wrong. I could just be overly hopeful, but I think I can visibly see him trust me, just a little more.

Chapter 21: Torture

He's panting breathlessly. I just bite my lip harder to remind myself to stay in control. The blanket is pulled to his waist. I've tried to hide as much of his pale skin from my eyes as I can. The light fabric keeps falling to his hips though.

Porcelain skin lightly blemished with faded pink scars tempt me; so, I shake the thoughts away. He's begged me to not leave him. I think he's more fragile than he wants me to believe, but he's also terrified to be touched. He has an unrestrained need to embraced. To be coddled right now. To be pleasured. He also has the fear to counter that.

Severus cannot control himself. Shoved between us is a pillow that mostly camouflages the deliberate rocking that his narrow bony hips cannot stop. Deliciously pink nipples are erect and cutely stand out on the heated skin.

I desire him.

I do not know wholly why. Or for how long. Perhaps it is the bond. His logic has been dulled since he is drugged and maybe that sense of desperation is leaking into my own sanity. Either way, I desire him. More than that, I desire his trust. So I will remain here in this endless torture. Having his body molded against mine desperately begging me to touch him, while also timidly trusting me to not do just that.

"H..Harry." I gently stroke his hair.

"It's okay. I'm here. I promise, I will not hurt you." I would never hurt him, but pleasuring him is on the same level as hurting him. I know that.

"I'm scared!" He half screams between muted moans. "I don't want this." I try to gently embrace him. I try to coax his head safely against my shoulder.

"I know Severus. It'll just be a day, then you'll be in control again. I promise, I will not hurt you."

"I don't want you to see me like this." His body spasms and he's moaning throatily through a beautiful sounding release.

"I'm sorry Severus. I know this is difficult, but before you didn't want me to leave. Have you changed your mind?" I don't know if I want him to have or not. I don't want to leave him, but this is torture. Sweet intoxicating torture.

"I don't want to be alone." His shaking hands grip the shirt I have on. It's his shirt. He couldn't even stand for me to leave the room long enough to find some clothes of my own. It only reminds me that he's naked under that blanket. There's no need to dress him, he will only dirty them through the numerous releases.

"Then, I will not leave you alone. I can control myself Severus." He seems to be breathing in my scent. I have to remind myself that I have more control than him right now.

"It was horrible." His arms are wrapped around me as if he's afraid I'll leave him. "Circled. Watched mockingly as whoever pleases defiles me." There is a hint of anger behind the lusty voice. "My body no longer in my control. Forced to respond. Forced to feel things I do not want to feel." The sharp bite of his nails in my back hurt, but I don't stop him. If I need to be the catalyst for his anger, then I will. If that helps him right now. Then I will happily take the pain. "I don't want to feel good!" He screams.

My fingers softly rub into his upper back.

"It isn't your fault Severus. It's over now. You're safe."

"It hurts so bad." He's crying. I can't see his face, but I can hear it. "It hurts so bad. And so good. Burning from the inside out. Cumming from being raped." His hands grab my hips and he uses that grip to anchor himself against me. The pillow in both of our laps does nothing to hide his hardness. "You shouldn't touch me. I'll defile you. I already have."

"You haven't done anything wrong Severus. I will not leave you."

"I shouldn't feel pleasure at being raped!" He screams and his fingers bruise me. He's shaking.

"It isn't your fault. You were drugged." My fingers tangle in his hair and though it's still damp, I enjoy the feel of it. "It's okay now Severus. It's over." He's hunched into me.

"It'll never be over." He says morosely.

"Severus." He doesn't fight my embrace. I feel like my heart is pounding in my throat. "I'm seventeen today." I gently wrap my arm around his narrow body. "I will try to be someone that you can rely on. I know that I'm not the most reliable person, but I want to be someone that you can rely on. I want to be someone you can trust. I know that you've been hurt before. I know you are hurt now. And I know you still see me as a disobedient brat, but you and I are soul bonded. I don't need someone to carelessly put themselves in danger just to keep me safe. I can keep you safe to." I didn't realize I was whispering until I feel him shiver in my arms. "Severus. Are you okay." His back arches.

"Merlin. Please. Do not whisper my name like that." My throat feels impossibly dry. I can feel his long legs circling around me. His head falls back as he's panting loudly. His neck is stretched tautly as his back arches pushing his pelvis harder against mine. "This blasted pillow is in the way." He whines unhappily.

"Severus. We have to leave the pillow in-between us. You don't have enough control right now, and I do not want you to do something you would regret. I will not leave, but the pillow has to stay between us." Gently, I pull his long body back against me. "Just lay here in my arms Severus. This is all I can give you right now. But when you are in control of yourself again, if we both wish to pursue an intimate relationship, then we will then." He's laughing bitterly while grinding against the pillow.

"You would not want me."

"Shh. Don't think that." It's hard to keep my hands above his waist

as he pulls another orgasm from himself. It's hard to lay there comforting him as he throws himself in and out of self -loathing rants, but I don't leave him. And I don't let my carnal desires take over even when he begs me to touch him. Because his words me nothing right now.

I don't leave his side until he's tiredly blinking and his body slowly returns to being his. This takes a full day.

I have to help him to the shower to clean him thoroughly again. He's covered in so much of his own semen. He can hardly keep his eyes open. With clean sheets on his bed, I lay him down gently and find some clothes to put on him. He's watching me suspiciously.

Without the lust clouding his judgement he's reminded of our positions. Unfortunately for him, his body is to exhausted to protest.

Once I dress him, I get him comfortable and then cover him. He says nothing.

"Severus. I promise, I will not bring up what happened yesterday. If you want to talk about it, then we will otherwise, I will not ask you to talk about it. For now, please get some rest. I know you are tired." His cheeks are a faint pink, but he just turns away.

I leave him and close the door with a soft click.

The hormone crazed part of my brain begs that I go to my room for a quick wank, but I have something more important to do.

I find Niffy.

It takes a while to convince her, but it's not necessarily difficult. After all, she wants what is best for Severus. With that logic, the two of us set out.

It takes surprisingly little time to meet with the headmaster. In his office, I should feel intimated, but I don't. I should feel small under his powerful knowing eyes, but I feel strong. And sure of myself.

"Mr. Potter, for what do I owe the honor of this unprompted visit?" I take a moment to gather my thoughts and how I want to say the

words. I'm not doing this for me. I'm doing it for Severus, and with that thought fueling the others, it's much easier to remind myself why I'm here.

"Headmaster, Severus will no longer be acting as a spy for the light."

Chapter 22: My Husband

"Harry, my boy. That isn't something you have authority to decide." I force my back to remain straight and upright. Choking down any weakness, I repeat myself.

"He will not be returning as a spy." The headmaster shakes his head.

"I understand that you are concerned for him, but right now the light needs him to gather as much information on the movement of death eaters."

"He isn't even accomplishing that though." I say as confidently as I can. "He hasn't gotten any new information since the raid on my relative's home. That hasn't changed the fact that he's been summoned nearly a dozen times. You have to know what goes on at those meetings." He already knows.

Albus Dumbledore exhales tiredly and takes a seat behind his desk.

"Yes Harry, I do know what he must go through in order to give our side the edge to win. My boy, I need you to understand that should Tom Riddle succeed, your concern over Severus will be a moot point. In times of war, we must all make sacrifices. I myself was prepared to die for the greater good, and unfortunately, I expect the same from Severus. Rest assured. He knows what I am asking from him and he did agree to become my spy. There are many things you do not know. He was not always loyal to the light. He himself agreed to become my spy and to any harm that goes with that."

"I didn't agree." I say and he tilts his head slightly. "I did not agree for him to become a spy, and he's my husband." The word feels strange on my lips. But to a certain degree, that's what he is.

"I'm afraid that Severus will continue to act as a spy."

"No. He will not."

"Harry. You are not in my position. You do not understand the potential outcomes of this war. You are still a child."

"A child that you instructed to rape his teacher." He pauses. "You deceived me. You knew that my uncle had molested me and you knew that Severus has been raped before. You knew all of that and you still instructed me to hurt him. We trusted you."

"It was the only way to ensure your safety. He knew that. He agreed."

"Because he had too! Well, now rather he likes it or not, he's stuck with me. We are soul bonded, and I do not want my 'husband' to be raped again. He will not return!"

"I'm afraid my boy, that he must."

"Then I will go to the daily prophet." The words are out of my mouth before I can stop them.

"Harry."

"That's what I'll do. And I know that Severus may hate me for it, but I will go to the daily prophet and I will confess that he and I are soul bonded. I'll out him for the spy that he is, and I will clear his name of the charge that he 'attempted to kill you'. I don't care if he ends up hating me." Of course I care. The thought manages to make my chest feel like it's being stabbed. "I would rather him hate me then continue being hurt the way he is now." It's difficult to reign in my emotional state.

"Are you aware of how greatly that would put him in danger. Riddle would be intent of killing him."

"If Severus stops attending the death eater meetings, then Voldemort will already desire to kill him. I know you and Severus think that I'm impulsive, but I have thought this over. You need a potions professor for the upcoming term, and I need to know that Severus is safe. If you refuse to rehire him, then I will still out him as a spy because I know he will continue putting himself in harm unless he knows going to that man would mean death. He isn't an

idiot. If you refuse to rehire him, then I will not be attending Hogwarts this term. Severus and I will find a safe place to hide. Just us." And the elves, but I will not bring their existence up right now.

"Do you really think Severus will agree to this?"

"I know he will not." Any progress I've made with Severus is dwindling. He will want nothing to do with me after this. I feel Niffy pat my arm in a show of affection. I almost forgot she was here. "I know he will not agree to this, but right now he's recovering and when he is conscious, I will talk with him. Even if he does not agree, I will not let him go back."

I don't know what else to say, but I'm thankful when I hear Niffy's sure voice.

"Master Severus does have persons that will help clear his innocence even if you refuse. My master is stubborn, but he will be unable to hate Master Harry. I am sure you know that already. Master Severus is quite fond of Master Harry." She is speaking respectfully, but still talking down to him. She sounds completely Slytherin. "If you do not agree to the rehiring of my master, then master Harry will be forced to take actions that he would not wish to take. It seems you are unaware of the situation you have placed yourself in." She grasps my hand as if to comfort me.

"No one will believe a house elf over a headmaster." The aged wizard says sure of himself.

"A headmaster that has allowed not one but two young students to remain in abusive households. You allowed Master Harry's uncle to molest him, and you allowed Master Severus's father to sexually abuse him. You allowed my master to remain in a home that fostered bitterness in his soul." She looks up at me. "I will not allow you to sink with the ship alone Master Harry. Master Severus asked for me to protect you. And I cannot bring myself to see him broken again." She smiles at me. "You are doing as you believe to be best for him, and though he may be upset at our meddling, he always comes around for those that he cares about."

"Harry. It isn't just his life. It isn't just your life. People are dying.

More will die."

"If Severus no longer has to hide behind his spy persona, then he could do more good than he is now. What about his Slytherin students that think they have to follow in their parent's footsteps. How many students have been lost to Voldemort's ranks? Headmaster, I am the boy who lived. I have never really cared for that title, but I'll use it to clear Severus's name. I would like to leave as much personal information out if I can, but I'm willing to discuss my home life if I have to. And I'm willing to discuss how he saved me from that. How he comforted me. Severus and I are soul bonded, and I will not allow him to continue as a spy. You may be willing to use him as a pawn, but I am not. We aren't chess pieces." He exhales again.

Fingers wave and a piece of parchment float in front of him. He takes his quill and dips it in the ink. Elegant penmanship is transcribed on the page, then the letter is folded and placed in an envelope and closed with a wax seal before handed to Niffy.

"Please see that your master receives this." Niffy bows her head in a submissive gesture. "Young Harry, the lives lost in this war will be on your shoulder, I hope that you know what you are doing." I recognize his words for what they are. He's trying to make me change my mind. Only, I don't think I could.

Niffy and I leave.

I'm not surprised that Severus is still sleeping. He would be tired. I'm also tired, but I don't think I could sleep. Even though he's kept me awake for over twenty-four hours. I tell Niffy that I plan to lay down, but in the back of my mind, I know that isn't the case.

I'm still a man.

I lock the door needing that to be enough and I strip down under the thick covers. I didn't lose control around him. Even though he was desperately making sounds. Even though he was desperately writhing against me. I managed to stay in control, but it's all coming back to me now.

I've never needed to wank so badly, and I feel awful. He was assaulted. He wasn't in control of himself. He was ashamed and embarrassed, but also *fucking erotic*.

No.

No.

No.

No.

I'm going off course. We are soul bonded. He may not hate me, but he certainly doesn't desire me like that, and I'm likely only like this because of the bond. I wasn't attracted to him before this... I also wasn't not attracted to him. I just never thought of him like that.

My body is throbbing. I did have that dream about him though. All of this. It's too confusing. How much of his actions were because of me and how much were because he was drugged?

I need to know.

But I don't think I could ever ask him. I close my hand tightly around my erection.

Am I really going to wank thinking about Severus... thinking about Snape. The sour bitter man with greasy hair. Cold cruel words. The man who has protected me. The man who has criticized me at every turn. The man who took in house elves that no one wanted. The man that has never been wanted by anyone...

The man that reminds me of all the things I hate about myself.

The man that treats me like everyone else.

Because I'm not someone special.

But then he treats me like I'm someone special... not because I'm special- the boy who lived- but because I'm... Harry?

He would die for me. I know he would. So is it so difficult to

believe that he could care about me.

He trusted me. Sure he was drugged, but he trusted me. To not hurt him and to see him so vulnerable. He trusted me to stay beside him but to not hurt him. He trusted me. That night that we... had sex in order to complete this bond. It makes so much more sense. Niffy said that his father had sexually assaulted him. And I know that he's been raped at those awful death eater meetings. He was so scared to be touched that night. He was scared.

Last night he wasn't scared though. Not in the same way. He let me bathe him. Even though it was embarrassing for him. He let me...

My erection throbs in my hand.

I can admit it to myself.

I don't understand it fully. But I can admit it in the safety of my own mind.

I want to hold him again.

Admitting that thought alone is enough to make me cum.

Chapter 23: Loss of the Light Spy

I left him alone for the remainder of the day. Partly because he needed to rest, and partly because... I wasn't really sure how to face him. He's not going to like my new approach with him, but I can't stop myself anymore.

I let myself into his room with nothing more than a gentle tapping knock. I have a tray in my hand with a bowl of tomato soup and a grilled cheese. He doesn't even move on the bed when I enter. I keep the lights dim and just leave the door open to allow light in from the rest of the house. I hope that little gesture makes him realized he's not trapped.

The blanket is pulled all the way up, over his head even.

"Severus?" I whisper so as not to startle him. I carefully reach out and touch his blanket covered arm. I can feel the arm tense under my touch. He's awake then and just ignoring me. "You need to eat." He seems to be holding his breath until I remove my hand from his arm. I set the tray down on the nightstand beside his bed and battle with myself. Should I remain standing. Should I sit beside him on the bed and try to bridge the distance between us. Should I just leave. That would certainly be easier.

"Leave." He says as if reading my thoughts. I'm not sure if he actually is, or if he just abhors my presence that much. But I can't leave. I have things to talk to him about.

"Severus."

"Leave." He says weakly. I sit down on the little space between him and the edge of the bed. I'm sure what transpired between us recently is fresh on his mind. I'm sure he's humiliated. It certainly wasn't like him. I'm sure I'm the last person he wants to see right now.

"I made you some soup. It's tomato. And a grilled cheese to go with it." I can feel him tense beside me. "I know that you told me not to cook anymore, and I know you don't normally eat very much. We shouldn't pretend that what happened... didn't happen. So I made you what has always been my comfort meal. I don't really know why. But it always helps me when... when I need some cheering up." It's silent between us. "Not that you need cheering up! That's not what I mean. I just mean..." Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. Why does he have to be so difficult to talk to.

"When Lily was pregnant with you, she ate grilled cheese and tomato soup obsessively." He is still under the covers, but I can hear him clearly.

"Will you eat then?"

"Just leave it there." That isn't him agreeing to eat it, but at least he's not rushing to throw it away. That's a start. "You can leave now."

"Severus, there are some things that we need to talk about." The bundle of blankets curls more into itself.

"Potter. There is nothing I wish to discuss with you. What you saw, pretend it never happened."

"My name is Harry. And it did happen." I reach out and this time I'm not surprised when the arm flinches away. "I understand that you are uncomfortable with touch." I touch him again knowing that he will pull away from me. But I need him to understand that I am not going to hurt him. "Severus. It's okay." I take a chance and slip my hand under the cover. Lightly I smooth his tangled hair. I wouldn't say that he relaxes into the touch, but he at least doesn't jerk away. Don't think about how I was using this same hand earlier to jack off. I said don't think about it.

It's quiet between us. We just let the silence grow and my peace offering grow cold. He doesn't stop me from tangling my fingers in his silky hair. Maybe he's use to this. Certainly not from me, but this seems to be the way all the elves show affection. Maybe he recognizes this as a nonthreatening act.

"Severus." I say quietly so as not to agitate his mood again. "You will not be returning as a spy." He tenses, but I just keep stroking his hair. "I spoke to the headmaster, and I know why you are a spy. I know that you may think it's not my place, but it is."

He's still quiet, and his silence makes me more uncomfortable than if he were yelling at me.

"You are stubborn. And needlessly mean sometimes. You don't trust anyone easily, you hold everyone at arms-length. You've made a lot of bad choices when you were younger. You have secrets that I still am not allowed to know. And you piss me off endlessly. But I care about you Severus." My words linger between us almost like an insult. It makes any other words catch in my throat. "You will not be returning as a spy." I manage to blurt out. The room suddenly feels colder.

"I know Harry." He finally says. "Niffy came earlier with Dumbledore's letter. I have been asked to resume my position as potion professor at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Niffy told me everything."

"You aren't... cross with me?"

"I am positively seething, but I am tired. And I simply don't have the energy to fight with Lily Even's son. I could never win against her and I seem just as unable to win against you. I do not know how you can have never met her and yet still be so much like her. You were willing to doom the entire wizarding world just to keep me from being injured in a way that I am already accustomed to. I take it that I cannot change your mind, but just for the record, once or a thousand times makes no difference in my mind. Harry, I was broken a long time ago. If allowing others to sexually assault me will aid in the safety of those that should not have to suffer..... then I will allow it."

"You shouldn't have to suffer either though."

"Harry. You are almost forty years too late to save me." The words hang between us. "My own mother didn't want me. She left with my younger sister when I still young. Because I was showing signs of

magic. She wanted to live in a world where magic didn't exist. So she took my sister who showed no signs of magic and she left. She left her abusive husband and took what she valued. And that wasn't me."

I lay on the bed facing the bundle of blankets. "Severus. That's all in the past." My words are completely inadequate, and I know that. But there is nothing else I can say.

"It isn't in the past. It's every day." He sounds so fragile. "After the first war, I wanted to kill myself. It was just Niffy and I." He exhales. "Then my sister came back. I had not seen her since she herself was an infant. She had had a baby. A newborn. That little baby looked so much like how I remembered her mother- my sister. Small. But happy and smiling. She was crying. My sister I mean. The baby. The baby was smiling. Happy. So very happy. But my sister didn't want a freak. So she went to the only other freak she knew of. My sister asked me if I could make her forget the child she had. She didn't want to remember how she gave birth to something.... 'not human'. She just wanted to forget. She asked me to raise her daughter. Or do whatever I wanted. She didn't care she said. Just she didn't want to know about her. So I erased my sister's memories. Erased her husband's. And started raising that child like she was mine." His tone is resolute and somber.

I gently wrap my arm around him. He doesn't seem to notice.

"It was hard taking care of a newborn on my own. At first all she wanted was her mother to hold her. Something that I was acutely familiar with. Then she got to the point where she would smile up at me as if I were something special. She started crying for me if I wasn't around. She would laugh. Hold out her little arms asking to be held. I love her. Her mother had named her Wendy, but she was my little Princess. She was my daughter. And no one else's. I never knew it was possible to love something so much."

I don't say anything. I don't want to bring him back to reality. His voice actually sounds younger. Happier even.

"Nothing else in life was worth living for, but she was. Albus knew that the dark lord would return. He knew that I would have to

resume spying because information is power. I don't know if he was honest. I don't know if he was manipulating me. I'm sure it was a little of both. But Princess was taken from me because I was an unfit parent. We didn't have much... sure I'll admit to that. I was working at Hogwarts during the day and coming back during the evenings- leaving her with Niffy while I worked. I wasn't paid very much granted. But she ate. And she was kept happy even though I've never been able to make another living thing happy, I could make her smile and laugh. I know that I wouldn't have been able to offer her very many worldly possessions. My father had died years before and left me nothing but debt and a broken-down house."

He sounds broken. He sounds not alive. Like everything has been taken from him.

"But I wasn't fit to be a parent. Because I had made mistakes that couldn't be forgiven. Albus was right. If I loved her then I had to accept living without her. Sometimes I think he just wanted me to feel expendable. If there is no reason for me to continue living... then it's fine if I continue to put my life in danger. Sometimes I think he's right. One day she would have gotten older, and she would have realized that her parents... her real parents did not want her. That all along, I was just playing pretend. She would have realized that my own parents did not want me. She would have realized that I am flawed and ugly and unfit to love her." He's shaking and it takes me a while to realize that I'm the one shaking him. I'm the one trying to break him from this trance he's in. "She would have realized that I sold my soul just to feel accepted. And she would have realized she was better off with parents that didn't love her as much as I do because it would be better than having me as a parent." He's breathing is sporadic. I've had them enough to realize that he's having a panic attack. "She would have realized that the only point of reference I've ever had for a loving parent is a father that gets off on raping his son. She would have realized that her guardian was broken a long time ago."

"Severus. Calm down. You have to breathe." The only sound coming from his lips is a half scream of pain and anguish. I can't see him, but I can hear the crying.

"Leave me alone!" He screams. I can't bring myself to pull my hand

away. "You're going to leave too. It's just a sick ploy to make me depend on you and then leave. Or be taken. I can't do it again."

"Severus. I'm right here. Come on now. Breathe." He's gasping.

"D.. don't touch. Don't touch me!" He's screaming and I can't calm him. I don't know what to do. "Get out! Get out!" He's thrashing. I can physically see him tightly curling into a ball. "I hate you!"

I'm trying not to panic myself when I see little Wendy running in through the open door. She quickly dogpiles on top of the blankets.

"Sevy!" She coos happily at the bundle of blankets. I'm tempted to take her and get her out of this room. She shouldn't see him like this. "Sevy, it 'kay. Just bad dream." She says gently. She manages to pull the blanket off of him and she smiles at the tired features. I try not to wince when I see how much he's crying. "Wen wen is here!" She smiles again. She shimmies down into the bed and comfortably cuddles next to him. "Princess is happy." She says seriously. "Sevy did best, but Princess happy now too." She tilts her head. "Dumbles wrong! Dumbles is dumb dumb. Sevy did best. But Princess happy and loved. Even if not by Sevy." She pats his head and he seems to settle down. As if noticing me for the first time, her face becomes completely serious. "Har har, Sevy is kay now." She looks back down at the grown man holding her securely. "Shh. It's 'kay Sevy. Wen wen is here. Sevy is just sleepy." Her gentle musing seems enough to calm him down. "Sevy is tired." She coos softly, and his eyes flutter close at her words. She's stroking his head like I was doing, only, it actually manages to calm him down. "Har har didn't mean to upset Sevy. Har har just cares bunches." She lovingly kisses the top of his head like a child would do to their parent. "Now. No more temper tantrums Sevy. You scared Har har!"

I've never been more sure of a choice I've made until now. Severus should not be a spy anymore. He will not be returning. And Dumbledore... That old bastard. I'm not going to let Severus be your pawn anymore.

Chapter 24: Telling the Friends

Niffy is at my side. Severus has locked himself in his room since the outburst. It wasn't my intention to upset him, but I honestly think it wasn't my fault this time. He just... he just lost it. I'm sure he would have preferred anyone other than myself to witness him... losing it.

He looked so frightened. So tired. I just let Wendy tend to him. She seems adapt at catering to his moods. Not necessarily in a bad way.

Soon Severus and I will meet with Rita Skeeter to discuss Severus's innocence. But. If the whole of the wizarding world is going to learn that Severus and I are bonded, my friends will know first. I don't plan to tell them everything just because... I value Severus's privacy. But I can tell them enough from my side. And another thing. I'm going to need their help- as far as Severus is concerned.

I'm sure Severus will not be well received by everyone.

Niffy pats my arm as we head to Hogwarts. I meet my friends in the great hall, they are already there waiting for me.

They both hug me and we idlily chatter for a brief moment. They both know that not why I'm here though.

"Harry. There is something you wish to tell us?" Hermione asks in her polite inquisitive tone. She's not pressuring me. She's not saying I have to talk about it now. She's only saying that she is ready whenever I am.

"I told both of you last time there there was a guy that I'm sort of with." I start easily enough. They look at each other silently.

"I swear if this bloke hurt you..."

"No Ron it's nothing like that. Far from it actually. I'm not sure if Dumbledore has told you, but Professor Snape will be returning as potion's professor." Both of their mouths hang open. Apparently he

did not. "Severus is loyal to the light." I say simply.

"But Harry. How can you be sure of that? He tried to kill Dumbledore last term."

"Yes. He did. But Dumbledore is the one who ordered him to. I have no doubts that Severus is..." How do I want to say it. I do not want to lie to my friends, but Severus said himself. He isn't loyal to Dumbledore. Just whichever side Voldemort isn't on. "Severus is not loyal to You-Know-Who." I exhale. Niffy pats my arm encouragingly. "In fact. Severus is the guy that I'm with."

Both stare at me wide eyed. As if I have been bewitched. Or cursed. Neither say anything at first.

"Harry... you just called him by his name." I hadn't realized. It's become natural to call him Severus.

"Yes. Severus and I are on a first name basis, but when he becomes my teacher again, I will call him Professor out of respect. Severus and I are soul bonded." It' s Ron who speaks.

"How did he trick you into it? Do you know how serious a soul bond is?!"

"He didn't. Well... I guess that's not completely true. He saved me. My relative's home was raided by death eaters, and he rescued me. Since then, I've been living with him and because the bond created by my aunt no longer existed, Dumbledore asked Severus to soul bond with me. Neither told me it was more or less permanent. But it isn't Severus's fault." Both of them look furious. "Look. This isn't about the soul bond. Severus and I are going to hold an interview with Rita Skeeter. We are going to fix Severus's reputation, and he will not be a spy for the light anymore."

Again, they both look at each other like I'm the one speaking nonsense.

"Harry."

"Hermione. I'm the one who decided he wasn't going to return as a spy. There are things about him that I cannot tell anyone. But he's

not the sort of person that I thought he was." Niffy is smiling gently while looking down in her lap. It's just Niffy, so I don't mind saying it. "I want to protect him. I think I might..." I don't want to say love. Love is to much too soon. "I care about him."

"It's Stockholm syndrome. Or maybe Florence Nightingale Syndrome. He saved you that doesn't mean that you actually have romantic interest in him." Hermione tries to reason. "Maybe if you felt someone for him before it would make sense, but you hated him before all of this."

Could she be right? No. I think for once she's wrong.

"Hermione, I'm not blinded or starry eyed." I start. "He's an asshole. I think possibly bipolar. An all- around difficult person to get to know. Deeply flawed. And someone who has been hurt worse than anyone could imagine. I haven't forgotten the bad. I'm not blinded."

"Then he forced you!" Ron says. He looks green. "I know that a soul bond means that both of you had to... you two had to have..." he can't say it.

"We had sex." I finish for him. Hermione goes pale.

"Did he take advantage of you?" Ron asks seriously. The question is so ludicrous to me that I have to try not to laugh. But I can't blame him for asking me. If I didn't know what I know... then I might would question the same thing in his situation.

"Ron. Hermione. Both of you are my closest friends. Severus has not done anything at all to take advantage of me. He would never. He hasn't hurt me. In fact. He's been fairly kind all things considered." Niffy pats my arm and the action isn't lost on my friends.

"Is that his elf?" Hermione asks. I know what she's thinking. She's thinking the same thing I initially thought. That Severus was the one who hurt her.

"Yes, she is. Although, technically she is a free elf. But she has chosen to help Severus, because she cares about him and he cares about her." Niffy remains quiet. "Severus saved her from her

original masters. He isn't a bad person. He's just hasn't had a chance to show anyone what type of man he really is."

I can tell neither of them are convinced. I know that I shouldn't blame them, but I can't help but come to Severus's defense.

"He's... He's a git though. And he doesn't bathe properly. He always has a bad attitude. Harry. Not him." Ron seems to plead. I half expect him to say 'AND HE'S A SLYTHERIN!'

"Severus is actually a very clean person. I think it's just the potion fumes and the fact that he has really dark hair. And I would be in a bad attitude too if I had to deal with You-Know-Who hurting me just to protect students that hate me. Ron, I know you don't like him. But he and I are soul bonded. And I've decided that I care about him. I decided that I want to protect him. I really need my friends to help me. Not everyone- especially in Gryffindor- will be willing accept his change."

It's quiet. Niffy clears her throat.

"Master Severus is scared." She says as if it's common knowledge. "He is afraid of being someone that can be pushed around. He had to fight hard to become strong and finding a middle ground is not easy. In the safety of his home, he can be fragile and caring, but once he leaves, he hides in his suit of armor. Because he is afraid. Master Severus cares very deeply for his students. He may not show it, but I know he does." He looks down at her hands in her lap. "And I know he cares for Master Harry as well. It is important to Master Severus that Master Harry is safe. It is his primary concern, above any other."

"Harry. Are you sure that it's... Snape you like." Hermione asks.

"Yes. But. I don't want to talk about liking him right now. In fact... I don't really want him to know that I think I might like him like that. He cares about me. But. Only because I'm my mother's son. There isn't anything going on between us other than... well. Honestly. It's complicated. I'm not sure really what his stance with me is. I don't think he has any interest in anything romantic."

It really is confusing for me. Ron exhales.

"Look Harry. I'll be nice to the bloke, but for the record, I still don't like him. If he hurts you..." Ron doesn't finish his sentence. Hermione pats Ron's arm.

"We just worry about you Harry, but if you trust him, then we will try to trust him."

"Thank you." I say. I suppose this could have gone worse, so I am thankful. Niffy smiles at me. I would love Severus to have more people that care about him. More people that trust him, but I'm afraid that will probably be a slow process.

Chapter 25: Telling the World

We are sharing a loveseat. Our thighs are lightly pressed together in what should appear a casual manner. Severus's long hair is pulled into a low ponytail. It suits him. He has strong features and the way his hair is pulled back has softened them enough where he could pass for friendly if he had to. Right now, he has too. He's wearing midnight purple robes. They also suit him. He looks approachable. Which is good given the circumstances. The robes were apparently 'a gift from Minerva because she wanted to brighten up my wardrobe'. I'll have to ask her where she got them so that I can get more for Severus in a similar style. They accentuate his long body without making him look domineering.

Our thighs are lightly pressed together in what should appear a casual manner.

Our shoulders bump and I lean slightly into him. Because we have to seem comfortable with the other person's touch. Because we are bonded.

Severus did not want to do an interview. He initially was going to leave the formalities to me and just deal with whatever the fall out maybe. I told him that I couldn't do it alone. We have to seem like a team. We need the wizarding world to see him as a hero. That's what he is after all, but it doesn't matter how brave or selfless a person is if they have everyone including themselves convinced that they aren't worth another chance. I told him he had to come. He inhaled then exhaled slowly. I half expected an outburst. Instead. He agreed.

He said something about how I couldn't be trusted to not unintentionally ruin his reputation. I told him I just wanted to improve his reputation. He said exactly. Because he's afraid that I'll make him seem weak. I think he thinks of himself as weak. Especially after the outburst in his room several days ago. I think, he thinks, I think he's weak.

On the contrary.

He's the strongest person I know.... I just haven't told him that. Maybe I should, but it's honestly scary admitting anything like that to him.

So Severus and I spend a couple of days preparing. We had to get our story straight. He said that was the most important thing. We couldn't contradict each other about what caused us to be bonded. So we are sitting on a loveseat together with our thighs light touching. Rita Skeeter's quill floats near her as she pushes her glasses up her nose. I organized this interview. I already told her the general information, but now she's in media mode. She needs to get the scoop.

"So. Why did you two decide to soul bond of all things!" Rita Skeeter directs the question to both of us.

"Severus and I became soul bonded because he wanted to protect me from You-Know-Who. This was the easiest and safest way to do so." I say. I asked him if we should keep the real reason a secret. He told me no. The best way to lie, is to not lie. Say what you must and omit the worst. Severus and I were forced into a soul bond.... Doesn't sound quite as good as saying we choose it for safety..

"A loveless soul bond. That's truly pitiable." Rita says grasping for a juicier story.

"Not at all. I have always felt very strongly about Harry." His thumb is stroking the top of my hand. I'm not sure if it's unconsciously or 'unconsciously'. Her floating quill stalls for a moment and looks at both of us.

"Severus. I understand that you were instructed to kill the headmaster, but now you are expected to return as a teacher."

"Yes. Albus ordered me to kill him. Thank merlin I was not successful. I have never been so glad to have failed." She grabs the quill and lightly brushes her mouth with the feather.

"Am I correct when I say that you are a half blood. Your father was

a muggle, and your mother a pureblood from the Prince family."

"You've certainly done your research." He says lightly. "Yes. I am a half blood."

"I find that interesting. Can you tell me, why would You-Know-Who trust someone that is a half blood. It's common knowledge how much he detests those without pure blood."

"It is not quite as common knowledge, but he himself is a half blood. I believe he developed a fondness for me because we have very similar upbringings as children. We both had mothers who were willing to give up their family name for a muggle man. We both have fathers that were not only unaware of the magical world, but detested it once they were made aware." Her quill returns to writing.

"Your father is deceased now. Am I correct?"

"Yes." He says simply he doesn't elaborate. She nods slightly.

"You were young when he died, and your mother was not involved in your upbringing." She states this as if it were common knowledge even though I'm sure she actually had to do some digging.

"I was thirteen when my father died. At that point, Albus essentially adopted me. The only reason I was able to remain a student at Hogwarts was because I spent the breaks brewing potions for the medical wing. I was allowed to live there. I owe the headmaster a lot."

"And yet you still initially started out loyal to You-Know-Who."

"I was loyal to the idea of being needed and accepted. What child at that age doesn't wish to feel like they belong. I was young and stupid. I grew up quickly enough and realized the error of my actions." She hums lowly to herself. Thinking of the next set of questions I believe.

"We have gotten a touch off topic. Let's go back to the beginning. The two of you are soul bonded so that you Severus can protect Harry."

"Yes." He says. His face remains just as straight. Rita's mouth tilts into a cat-like grin.

"I imagine the consummation was something." She turns to me. "The bond must involve a strong wizard and a virgin. Clearly you are both strong wizards, and I can imagine that Harry is- was," She corrects herself, "the virgin. It must have been quiet the experience. Considering the age difference, I'm sure having an older partner with experience made the entire ordeal much more savory." When neither of us speak, she smirks. "That is assuming of course that it is young Harry who plays the part of the girl."

I'm not sure what to say to that. I don't really feel comfortable with anyone picturing Severus and I.. like that. It's uncomfortable.

Severus wraps his arm over my shoulder and pulls me into his side. I'm surprised that I don't have to fight myself to stay next to him. It's comfortable like this. Like I can rely on him.

"Harry and I were both relatively inexperienced, and as for who plays which role." Severus smiles coquettishly. I've never seen him look like that. It makes me... feel odd in places. Not necessarily bad odd... just... don't get hard in front of the lady that's interviewing you odd. "Harry and I would prefer to leave what happens in the bedroom between him myself and our bed. Whatever may or may not go on is hardly anyone's business." Thank you. He still has an easy smile on his face, but the tone is obvious. This topic is off limits.

I'm thankful that she seems to actually take the hint.

"Harry. What would you say is the best and worst thing about being soul bonded to Severus?" I debate moving, but Severus's arm is still around me. That's reason enough to not move. I know most of this is an act. Even if Severus did feel that way about me, he isn't the type that would show affection publicly. And I can't think of the last time someone help me like this. So I don't move. And I hope Severus doesn't expect me too. Both are looking at me and I flush. I wasn't paying attention.

"Oh um... best and worst thing." This is difficult. "I think the worst

thing is, it did start out of necessity. I don't really know if either of us would have pursued a relationship with the other. Honestly, I thought for the longest time that he hated me and because of that, I think I convinced myself that I had to hate him too." The best way to lie, is to tell the truth. But omit the worse. The worst thing about being soul bonded to him, is that I had to rape him that first night. I had to hurt someone that was already half broken. "The best thing... I feel like for the first time I actually have a family. I actually feel like I'm cared about." She nods apparently accepting my answer. Then she turns to Severus. I can see him physically swallowing. He's nervous.

"Same question." His tone is much more even than mine was. He could almost convince me that he wasn't nervous right now. If I didn't notice how his entire body has become stiff.

"The worst thing would definitely be that he's a Gryffindor." The tone comes out half teasing. "No doubt he will eventually wish to adopt a child and place all of those silly Gryffindor ideologies on my child. Making them value foolish things like bravery. I wouldn't want to have a child that does half the foolish things that Harry does. I'm to old to spend the rest of my life worrying about my husband or child taking on a dark lord on their own." A child. Is this just him making us look good. Or is this for real. He shakes his head mostly at himself. "The best thing..." He pauses and I'm honestly afraid that he will not be able to think of anything. But he smiles. And for a brief moment he actually laughs. If I didn't know better, I would say that this is the very moment that he fell in love with me. But. That's foolish talk.

"Severus, something you wish to share." Rita says.

"The best thing about being soul bonded with Harry would likely be the fact that he's a Gryffindor." Rita and I look at each other. Has he lost his marbles. "I do not think I have ever had someone so determined to save me. Or so determined to not hurt me. I've spent most of his time in school going out of my way to make him miserable because it was my mission to keep him safe and to keep him hating me. Since we've been soul bonded he's had ample chances to hurt me in return. But there is not a drop of desire in his head to do that. He isn't conniving. He isn't searching for a way to

make the situation something he can manipulate. He's straightforward and honest. If he says something, then I have no reason to doubt him."

My throat is dry. The feather is frantically writing trying to capture all of his words. And I think that my face is red. I know it is when Rita laughs.

"Very interesting."

The questions come and go. Some are more personal than others. Some are difficult to answer while some are easy. Just when I think we are out of the woods, Rita asks something neither Severus or I prepared for.

"Severus, our readers are dying to know. What exactly happened at those death eater meetings?" The little color Severus had in his face is gone. He's stalling. Freezing. His thumb no longer rubs the top of my hand. It's obvious, he wasn't anticipating that question. And he doesn't know what exactly to say. We prepared for most of her answers. The bond obviously was fair game and going to be questioned, but this... this wasn't what we thought would be brought up.

"You would be dying if you did know." He says falling back into old habits. I wish I could have stopped him from saying that. I've dealt with Rita before. Deliberately skirting around a question only makes her that much more curious. She's opening her mouth to continue questioning him. I reach and lightly squeeze his hand. It's ice cold.

"Severus and I have decided that we will not be discussing that at this time. I am just glad he was a part of the meetings so that he could save me from my relative's house."

"Oh yes Harry dear, I'm sure that must have been terrifying for you dealing with that awful raid." She's turning back to Severus. Clearly about to question him further. I didn't want to do this.

"I meant saving me from my relative's. I'm actually thankful for the raid, because of it, I am living with a man that would do anything

to keep me safe and I actually feel like I have a family now." He's looking at me intently. Silently questioning me. He doesn't understand. The only way to distract a predator is with fresh meat. If she smells a story that is juicier then she will leave him alone. It's our only option. Severus can't appear suspicious right now. We need a good interview.

"I take it that your aunt and uncle that you were previously living with were not the warmest muggle family?" Severus is watching me. I can tell. He's silently telling me I don't have to do this. But I do. Because. I understand. For me. Growing up in an abusive household will make me a tragic hero. I can practically see the headlines and it disgusts me. *'Orphan hero suffers under abusive muggle relatives.' 'Potter: boy who lives. Boy who was abused?'* It'll only make the masses think higher of me. And thinking from a Slytherin mindset, it'll make the man who saved me look that much better.

No. I do not want to talk about this. I don't want all of the wizarding world to know that my uncle would touch me... or make me touch him.

"My uncle... he..."

"Harry Potter's personal life will remain just that."

"Severus, really it's fine." It's not fine. I have to keep myself from begging him to save me.

"You are not doing this." He says adamantly. "I do not need to be saved by you." Idiot. Can he not see the quill? RIGHT. THERE. "We will both maintain our secrets, or we will both confess. I will not have you cover for me."

"It would seem the love birds aren't getting along quite as well as they wanted us to believe."

"Actually. I would think it's a testament to how well we are getting along." I say. "Severus is just very... protective of me. And to be honest. I'm a bit protective of him."

"I smell a scoop." She says. Again, she takes the quill and touches it

to her lips.

"Harry and I are both still learning to deal with our pasts. As some point, we may be willing to air our dirty laundry, but at this time, I'm afraid we just are not ready. Now. I believe we have been questioned enough." Severus stands affectively pulling me up with him.

"I still have more questions!"

"You have enough for several stories already. Rest assured. When we have more to share, we will go to you. After all, weren't we the one's who contacted you this time." She remains frozen. I don't think she's ever been promised that more stories will be brought to her. I look up at Severus. He looks tired. I wrap my arm around his waist and smile at the reporter.

"Please forgive him, he can only stomach being away from bed for so long." Her mouth hangs open and I think I actually hear Severus laughing beside me. After all,... I didn't lie. Just...

Omitted some of the truth and let her draw her own conclusions.

Chapter 26: Another Dream and a Surprising Confession

I'm being pinned down. My left forearm burns as if it were set on fire. I can feel people watching me, but I can't actually see them. I'm being touched.

Fingers are stabbing into my skin, and I want to beg them to stop. But I don't say anything. I'm biting down on my lip until I taste blood just so that I don't respond. I want to scream. But I can't seem to let myself. I can hear laughing and a shame and disgust wash over me. I want to scream. I want to fight. But I can't fight. I can't fight. I just have to accept this. Was I so flawed that I actually deserve this?

I feel dirty.

I want to vomit, but I know if I vomit, it is just as telling. I have to be pleased at this. I have to be thankful. *Thankful!* Thankful that I am being raped. Thankful to be used in this way. I've only let one other man touch me like this, and it was only because I was too young to stop him. I hated him. I hated how he would laugh when I begged him to stop. 'It hurts!' I would cry, and he would laugh. I'm sure if I cried out in pain now as well, this man would only laugh at me. It doesn't matter. I deserve this.

Even when he finishes inside of me at the rest of those masked figures applaud and laugh. I don't move. I haven't been given permission to move. He points his wand at me and I know what's coming. I try to not cry. I try to not beg him for mercy. I try to remind myself why I am here.

The boy.

Lily's son. Lily's perfect little son. The son that she loved enough to sacrifice herself. So I force myself to be calm. Even knowing what's about to happen.

"Thank you, my lord." I say with an easy smile. Because this is what he wants from me. My undying loyalty. If I were truly loyal to him and his ideals, then being fucked publicly by him should be viewed as a reward. Being under his wand should be a pleasure. I smile again. Does my smile look forced? I hope it doesn't. It should seem natural. "Thank you." I repeat as I reach out to kiss the hem of his robes. He smiles back down at me.

"You have done well Severus." I keep my body relaxed even knowing what's coming. I bitterly laugh inwardly at the sick pun. "Crucio." The pain hits me first. But I force myself to remain looking at him. He hates when I look away. He's smiling fondly down at me. I'm his favorite. He's always liked me. Which is good for a spy, but bad for a follower. His erection is in his hand as he works himself to a finish.

"T..Thank you my lord." I say again. Because anything less than gratitude is unacceptable. This continues until I lose consciousness or he becomes fully sated.

I want to die.

I want to die.

I wake up screaming. Was that a dream. Why... why was I experiencing things from Severus's point of view. My left arm burns where the dark mark would be... if I actually had one. But I don't. But still the burn is there. I actually have to look at the skin to convince myself that there is no tattoo on my forearm.

The dream was so real. So vivid. I could actually feel the pain, but now that I'm awake, it's muted. How accurate was that dream? Strike that. I don't actually want to know. I need to check on Severus. That's what I need to do right now. Check on him.

My legs feel like liquid when I try to stand.

I'm almost to his room when I see a light on in the kitchen. Niffy wouldn't be awake at this hour.

When I look inside, I see Severus, sitting at the table calmly poring

himself a cup of tea.

"Potter." He says not turning around. "The dream no doubt woke you. Please. Sit. Have a cup with me." He doesn't sound enraged. He doesn't sound bitter. Or ashamed. Just neutral. Maybe even monotone.

I sit across from him. He pours me a cup.

"It's a bit late for tea."

"Nonsense. I cannot possibly sleep after that, and I seriously doubt you could either." No. I couldn't. The tea is almost syrupy sweet. At the look on my face, he smiles. "I apologize." He takes a sip of his. "I often will prepare an entire pot for myself and prepare it to my liking. Had I known you would be joining me, I would not have done that. I could fix you fresh tea if you would like. Rest assured if you would like that, this tea would not go to waste."

"This is fine. I just didn't expect it to be this sweet." I don't see how he could normally drink this. It doesn't really suit his image.

"Lily liked it just as sweet." He smiles fondly into his cup before wincing and rubbing his left forearm. "It would seem the dark lord has seen the daily prophet and is displeased."

"Is he trying to summon you?"

"More accurately, he's trying to remind me whom I belong too. Harry. Tom Riddle is in love with me. I'm sure if I returned and begged for his forgiveness, he would take me back with his arms wide. I would never be permitted to leave his side again though, and I would be punished. At one point in my life, I was.. lonely and willing to be hurt if it meant not being alone. He looked at me as if I were special. Because he believes I am. Unfortunately, he enjoys... hurting those he cares about. I believe it might be a fetish of his. I'm sure from his point of view, you are the bad guy keeping his lover from him."

"He's... in love with you." Severus exhales.

"Yes. He was very charismatic in the beginning. I completely fell for

it." He takes another sip. "He embraced me and told me things I had wanted to hear my entire life. That I was important. Or intelligent. Attractive. The entire story is truly pathetic." He shakes his head at his own folly. "How much more Slytherin could I be. I didn't love him. But I loved the things he would say to me. I loved being important. I loved being favored. As it goes, by the time I woke up from my delusions I had already tainted my soul. I believed him. All muggles should be exterminated. After all. My father was a muggle. It was easy to set me down the wrong path."

"Severus. When did he start..."

"Raping me? Fucking me? Making love as he believes?" He exhales. "I made the mistake. I was vulnerable. He wanted to have me and I was scared. I thought since he loved me he would understand. So I told him what I had never told anyone. My father had raped me so many times that the idea of sex was... terrifying to me. I told him that I was scared. I told him that I wasn't ready to be touched in that way. And I think that excited him. He's a sadist. Maybe because he was also abused as a child. I don't know. But in his mind, he loves me. In his mind, violating me in front of his death eaters is proving that I belong to him." He takes another sip. "Once a newly initiated death eater thought that I was the communal toy and made the mistake of touching me without the dark lords permission. I cannot begin to tell you the torture that man underwent. He does not typically like for me to be touched by anyone. The last time was different. He did something that he had never done before. He let the others do as they wanted. He was angry with me. Because I... I couldn't become aroused. I normally could force myself, but I just couldn't this time. So, he drugged me. And said if he wasn't good enough for me then..." He stops talking. His already pale face looks sickly right now.

"Did you tell him that you didn't like to be hurt?"

"Yes Harry. I did. I told him that I didn't like to feel humiliated. I didn't like to be touched roughly. I didn't like pain. He told me I couldn't leave him. He made his argument very convincing. But. You've seen the scars so I really don't need to go into detail."

"Severus. Why are you telling me this? You normally aren't so

forthcoming." His eyes are tired.

"Harry. You are putting your good name on the line for me. It is only fair that you know who exactly you are protecting." He sighs as he finishes his cup. "A pathetically scared boy that didn't know how to escape a crazy obsessive lover. The dark lord got off on raping me because in his mind that's how you show love. He might have wanted you dead before, but now it's actually personal to him. Harry as far as he's concerned, you stole and seduced his lover."

"Does Dumbledore know that you and Voldemort were... together?"

"Yes, and he exploited it. But in way, I guess I did too. Harry. I truly believe that the dark lord loved me in his own perverse way. A part of me feels bad about it actually. I'm not justifying his actions. The things he has done to me are... heinous. I still have nightmares." He says laying his head in his hands. "But you already know that. And I begged him to stop. It only angers it. Once I realized how evil his actions actually were, I went to him. Not as a follower, but as a naive lover who actually believed his words would hold any weight. He told me that I was forgetting how corrupt muggles are. So he gathered me up. Took me to a private room. There were too muggles inside. A little girl. She couldn't have been more than two. And a man. The dark lord gave the man a rock and told him that if he killed the little girl. Then he would get to go free, but if he didn't. Then they would both die." His hand covers his mouth. Frantically he rushes to the trashcan. He almost doesn't make it before I hear vomiting.

My hands are shaking, but I go to him. I hold his hair back as he empties the contents of his stomach. He's shivering.

"Voldemort has to be stopped." Severus says simply. There are bags under his eyes.

"Severus. You need to sleep."

"No." He shakes his head. "Wendy is already asleep down with her mother. I will not wake her. I can't take another dreamless sleep tonight. I can't Harry." My arm wraps around him as I lead him to his room. Something akin to fear sets in. "No!" He shouts. His eyes

are wide.

"Severus. I'm not going to hurt you. I'll stay with you tonight." He shakes his head.

"I can't sleep. I don't want to see those memories."

"I'll stay the entire night." I assure. I help him into bed. He curls tightly into the fetal possession. I just cover him and then lay beside him curled under a separate blanket.

"I don't like pain." He say. I stroke his hair and he sighs. His eyes flutter close.

"That's okay Severus. Because I don't like hurting people." He lets me pull his head against my chest. He lets me stroke his head until he quiets. He lets me hold him as he drifts off to sleep.

Chapter 27: Let's just be honest

The night has a way of amplifying. It increases anxiety. Fears. While lowering inhibitions. But when the sun begins to rise, reality sets in. We are getting too comfortable with one another.

Severus is still snugly against me. His dark hair is covering his face. My arm is wrapped around him. I know he's awake right now. But he's trapped. Trapped in the reality that last night he allowed himself to be vulnerable. I'm sure he even realizes that I know he's awake, but he hasn't moved. And I can't bring myself to pull away from him.

So we are playing a waiting game. Which one will initiate the awkwardness. Severus allowed a student to comfort him. But I can't move away from him for a very humiliating reason.

Morning wood.

I have to admit, I didn't think about this last night. It's normal for me to wake up erect. I mean. It's normal for most guys. That doesn't make it less embarrassing. I feel like my heart is pounding in my throat.

"Why are you doing this." The voice is quiet. I thought I imagined it at first.

"What do you mean." I say equally quiet.

"I just don't understand why you are taking care of me like this. Do you feel obligated because we are bonded? I can assure you, I've managed on my own before." He exhales. "Of course I can say that now, but I couldn't last night. I wouldn't have slept at all last night if not for you." The honesty from him is refreshing.

"Severus." I can feel something hard poking my side. We both know what it is, but I don't say anything. The awkward silence grows between us. After all... it's normal for most guys and I guess Severus

is no different. Still. I feel it pressing against my side. If I move away then it will be obvious that I've noticed it. Same for if he moves away. I can tell he's embarrassed, I'm actually glad my lower parts are turned away from him. I think that would only make it more awkward.

"I swear, it's completely involuntary." He assures me while deliberately pushing me away. His tone is elevated. "It has nothing to do with you." His normally low voice is a much higher pitch. He's trying to sound nonchalant. I don't think he's fooling either of us.

"It's okay Severus. I understand. We are both men after all." It's quiet again. It's like he doesn't know what to do in this situation. But neither do I.

"Harry. The new term will be starting soon." Changing the subject seems as good a way of dealing with this as any.

"Yes. What about it?"

"I do not know what you wish to do, but you have the option to either stay in the Gryffindor common rooms or with me in my personal bed chambers. It could look suspicious for bond mates to not share a room, but I do only have the one bed." He swallows as if to force himself to remain neutral. "The choice is completely yours. If you wish to remain with your house mates, and that gets brought up with the media, then we should be able to settle matters by explaining that we wanted your last year to be a normal as possible." From the way he's talking, it's difficult to tell which he would prefer.

"Severus. What do you want?" He wraps his arms around himself.

"Don't worry about me. This is up to you to decide."

"Severus, please. I want to know what you want." I press the palm of my hand against his back. I'm ready to fight him on this in order to get what I want, but instead he almost immediately concedes and answers my question.

"I don't like sleeping alone. I can't keep the nightmares away every

night. Without Wendy, and not being able to take the dreamless sleep often, I have the tendency of not sleeping most nights." My hand travels up his back until my fingers are tangled in his hair. I feel like the world is holding it's breath waiting for Severus to continue. "Last night I was comfortable having you hold me. I would not be opposed to have you... sleep next to me again." He's trying to sound unaffected, but that's not the case. He wants me to move in with him. He wants us to live like real bond mates. Fuck.

"Severus." My body is aching. I don't think I can do this. I sit up and it feels odd not having him in my arms. He pulls the blankets up to his chest as if to shield himself even though he's fully dressed. "I don't know that it's a good idea for me to continue like this." Dark expressive eyes close off and his ears are lightly pink as if he were ashamed of himself.

"Quite right." He simply says. "I have inconvenienced you. I apologize." He's trying to leave the bed. He's not looking at me.

"Severus, please wait. It's not like that." When he still tries to leave, I grasp his thin wrist. His entire body freezes. "I like taking care of you. I like helping you sleep at night. You aren't inconveniencing me. It isn't about that." My groin hurts. I think I might have blue balls. "Severus, I'm a man. And I have pretty good self control, but the more time I spend holding you like this, the more my hands want to touch you in other places. I don't want to be another person to hurt you. I don't want to take advantage of you, and I do not want to break your trust."

His black eyes are widely staring at me as if I were some strange creature.

"You... want to touch me." He says the words as if they were an impossible statement.

"I'm going mad Severus. I don't want to make you uncomfortable around me. I also don't want you to think that I have an ulterior motive. Last night, I wanted to know that you wouldn't have anymore nightmares and if you did, I wanted to be there in case you needed me. I had no intentions of doing anything improper. But I am still a man Severus. I don't know how well I'll fair sharing a

bed with you every night. I'm sorry Severus, but I really want to be intimate with you." His entire face is flushed red. His small mouth is parted in shock and I can't stop looking at the thin chapped lips.

A shiver runs up my spine and the arousal I was experiencing increases tenfold.

He stands abruptly and seems to rush out of the room simply calling out that he needed to be alone and he was going to take a shower. It looks more like he is running away.

I messed up. I scared him off. I shouldn't have said any of that. I should have just quietly continued to... but it was getting more and more difficult. Even now, I shouldn't be hard like this. But the familiar ache will not let up. It hurts almost pleasantly.

But I shouldn't touch myself in his room. In his bed. His bed that smells like us. I held him in this bed. I had sex with him. I want to try again. I want to actually make him feel good. I want it to be a pleasant experience.

I want to hear him moan my name.

The shiver of pleasure rushes up my spine again even though I haven't touched myself. My body has been aching the last few days, but today has been the worst so far. It's like I have an itch that I just can't scratch no matter how hard I try. A desire to be held.

To be held?

No. That doesn't make sense. I don't fancy myself to be held... so much as one that holds. I've never wanted to be 'held'. But the need is still there. This unfamiliar need. Like it doesn't belong to me... Does that mean. It couldn't.

I don't waste time. I don't even bother to knock. I just can't stop myself.

I can hear the shower spraying, but I don't care right now.

I pull back the curtain to find Severus kneeling down in the tub and frantically thrusting fingers inside of himself. He notices me

immediately but it's like he can't stop.

"It wasn't me who's been ruffled, it's you." His mouth is hanging open and shame twists all of his features. He's opening his mouth and then closing it trying to find what to say.

"I'm sorry." He says. His eyes clinch close. "I'm sorry." He hunches into himself as if to hide as much of his body as possible. "Please don't look. I'm sorry."

"Severus, how long have you wanted me to touch you." I reach out and he flinches from my touch. "Severus. Talk to me."

"I don't know what's wrong with me." He screams. "I hate being touched. I hate being looked at. I hate being held. I hate sex. I don't know what's wrong with me! I have nothing but negative experiences, but..." He folds into himself. "But I keep wanting..." He doesn't finish the sentence. I think we both know.

"Severus, come out. Let's talk in your room like rational adults." This time when I reach out and place my hand on his arm, he doesn't jerk away. Instead his eyes seem to flutter as he moans lowly through a parted mouth. It's intoxicating. "I swear that I will not hurt you Severus." I manage to pull him up on his shaky legs. "Are you alright?"

"I feel light headed. And utterly humiliated. I should have more self-control than this." I stroke his wet hair. He's stopped masturbating and is instead clinching his hands together as if to keep control of them.

"You can blame it on me and the bond. You are forced to deal with a hormonal teenagers unquenchable sexual appetite." I'm not sure how true that actually is, but I'm fine giving him an out if he wishes to take it. I take his hand and lead him back to the room.

Uncomfortably he sits on the bed and looks at me. His legs are tightly together in order to ground himself and maintain control of his body. Maybe to also regain some of his modesty. I hand him a blanket and he pulls it all the way around him.

"What exactly is it that you desire Severus?" His hands shake. "We are soul bonded. There is no reason to be ashamed of any desire we may or may not feel for one another." This is really embarrassing, but I'm trying to be the voice of reason.

"I don't want sex." I would be lying if I said I wasn't a bit disappointed. "Harry my head is muddy. I want things that I'm terrified of. So I don't want them." He looks in pain... but not bad pain. "Please... I really need to be alone right now." It's obvious why.

"It looks like you just completely lost control." His eyes are closed tight.

"It's all your fault. No one would ever say those things to me and you say them without any shame. I'm not equipped to hear those things." He's shouting, but I understand him better. He's not angry even though it looks like he is. He's just deeply embarrassed and maybe even a bit shy.

"Severus. I didn't say anything bad."

"Exactly!" He folds into himself. "I'm twice your age. I'm utterly fucked up. And I was just... over a student. I don't know what you want from me!"

"Severus, it's okay that you want to be held."

"I don't want to be held!" He seems to choke on his words. "I don't want to be touched. I don't like pain." He's screaming at me, but then much quieter he whispers, "I shouldn't want to be held." Gently I grasp his hand.

"It's okay. Severus. It doesn't have to hurt. I know that the only experience you have involves you hurting, but it doesn't have to be that way." He's looking at me suspiciously. I hold both of my hands up in what I hope looks to be a nonthreatening manner. "Severus, I do not want to hurt you. I really want for us to feel good together. I like touching you. I care about you." He's staring at me wide eyed again and I half expect him to run away again.

"I don't like sex." He says looking away from me.

"It doesn't have to be sex. I know that you are aroused." It's hard to look at him. "So am I. We could do other stuff. If you wanted. I wouldn't hurt you. But I understand if you don't want to. It's up to you Severus."

Chapter 28: Just a kiss

We are sitting across from each other on his bed. Both of us naked but refusing to look at each other. He's still reluctant. I gently take his hand but I notice how he tenses.

"If I say that I don't like something..."

"Then I will stop immediately." I say. I try to calm my pounding heart and actually smile at him. "Severus. I can't guarantee I will be any good or that I will be able to make you feel good. I'm very inexperienced."

"That doesn't matter." He says looking away from me deliberately. "Harry, what's wrong with me." He sounds so unsure of himself. "Why do I want to be touched so bad when I hate it." I inch closer to him and cup his narrow face in my hand.

"Severus, you are desperate to be touched." His eyes are wide but I continue. "You are starved for affection. Severus, I think you want to be coddled. Protected. Touched gently. Told sweet nothings." His face is completely red. "Honestly Severus, you seem to want really 'vanilla' things. You just had a bit of bad luck and haven't been given what you want. I don't want to be rough with you. I don't want to hurt you. I actually..." I'm so nervous. "I actually want to touch you gently. And coddle you. And protect you. And whisper sweet nothings." He squirms a bit. I try to remain calm. I don't want to be anxious when he's anxious enough for the both of us. "It's okay if you are scared. Or nervous. I am too." At my admission, he seems to calm down a bit.

"Maybe we shouldn't." He says as if It were not already too late. We've opened pandora's box. Sure. We could back out now. We could refrain from exploring exactly what this desire between us is. We might even manage to pretend this never happened. A part of it is already to late though. We've confessed our sins. I know that he desires me. And he knows that I desire him.

"It's completely up to you Severus. But we are bonded. I'm not going to let you break this bond between us even once the war is over. That doesn't mean we have to do this now. That doesn't mean we ever have too. But I'm tired of pretending that I don't want more." The air around us is supercharged with hormones. "I've never wanted to touch someone so much. Severus. Can I... can I kiss you?"

I watch him back away from me all while slowly nodding. I take his hand in mine. He's trembling. His mouth is slightly parted and he's breathing slowly and shallowly. With my other hand I embrace his jaw. Wide dark eyes watch full of nervousness and inexperience. He's flushed. He looks shy and vulnerable. This must be what made Voldemort fall in love with him. He looks so cute that I can understand why someone would want to tease him. I can understand why someone would want to force this expression back on his face time and time again. It's intoxicating.

"Can I kiss you Severus?" I ask again. Because I want to be sure. If we are going to explore the idea of a deeper relationship, then I will not start it off wrong. When he doesn't answer, I softly stroke his cheek with my thumb. "I need a verbal answer Severus." It's clear from his unsure eyes that he doesn't know his own answer. I don't rush him. I don't mind being patient. I don't mind giving him all the time he needs to decide.

A pink tongue darts across his chapped lips and I have to remind myself to not chase after it. I wait for his answer and when he does finally speak, it sounds breathless. "Yes." He holds perfectly still while I slowly close the distance between us. I give him ample time to back away. He's looking at my lips then back to my eyes frantically. Once I'm only a few centimeters I hold my position. It would take nothing to close the gap between us. But once we do this there will be no going back. He licks his lips again. Dark expressive eyes close, and I use that as the opportunity to connect our lips.

His thin lips part submissively the moment my hand slides to the back of his neck. I need to taste him. I need to taste his lips. His mouth. His adorable pink tongue. All in all, he tastes like sugar. So sweet I feel like I could get a cavity just from kissing him. And I crave more. Sucking on his tongue and exploring the wet cavern

that is his mouth until he pulls away very suddenly. His hands are on my shoulders pushing me off of him and his head is hanging down with his hair blocking his face.

I'm afraid that I did something wrong.

"Severus. Look at me. What did I do?" I tilt his head up so that I can look in his eyes and he moans throatily. His body spasms and suddenly my stomach is sticky. I look down to see his erection shooting out another spurt and then slowly become flaccid. "Severus, did you cum from being kissed." He's panicking. He can't hide this. He knows he can't.

"I'm sorry." He says. "I didn't mean too. That's.." He laughs awkwardly. "That's never happened before." His covers his face with his large hand. "This is completely humiliating." It's cute actually. It makes me want to kiss him again.

"Does... you know who kiss you often." Why did I ask that. That is hardly the right topic for this mood. Why am I so stupid? He looks away from me. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked that. It's none of my business."

"He does. It's never been like that though. I felt..." He stops talking.

"How did you feel." I press. I need to know if it was anything like what I just felt. Fireworks. Sparks. Explosions.

"Weightless." He says. Okay. Not what I was expecting to hear. He chuckles awkwardly again. "Like I could float away. Like it was unreal. Could you..." He's flushed again. "Could you kiss me again?" A thousand times. Instead of clasping his jaw again, I wrap my arms around him and pull him to my chest. "Harry?"

"Sorry. I feel a bit out of it. I'm just so glad that I was able to make you... you know." He smells like earth. Ash. Fire. "I was afraid that it was only me. Or that I wouldn't be able to..."

"Harry." He says softly. "I don't want to hurt you either." His hand is shaking. "But I do not know that I could match your expectations. I am also inexperienced. The limited experience I have involves me

more or less doing nothing and just... letting him do what he pleases. And I've been taken so many times. That I don't know that it would even feel good for you. He doesn't like being gentle. He's ripped me more than a few times." He feels like liquid. "I didn't want to tell you that." Before I can ask why he did he lays his head on my shoulder. "But if we are ever going to be intimate, then you should know."

"Severus. Sometimes for extra food, I would suck off my uncle." I never wanted to admit this to anyone. "I initiated it several times. I was always so hungry. And I knew that if I gave him what he wanted then I would get to eat something. When Dumbledore somehow made my uncle stop... I was glad to not have to do that anymore, but I was also miserable because that was the only way I could get food."

An air of silence hangs between us. Maybe we should both be ashamed of ourselves. Maybe we should feel humiliated. But I feel better admitting that to him. The silence isn't awkward. It's healing. His shoulders are shaking when I embrace him harder. I hear him crying. Too mentally exhausted to even stop himself.

He's crying on my shoulder. His long fingers dig into my back.

And I'm crying on his. My fingers dig into his back.

So we sit there. Naked with his cum drying between us. And we cry. Loudly. Bitterly. Like we haven't cried before. Like we are tired of being strong. Like we are tired of pretending we are okay. We cry. And when the tears slow and eventually stop, he pulls back and looks at me.

His eyes are puffy, and from the feel of it, so are mine.

He doesn't tell me that everything is okay. And I don't say that to him. It's like be both know. Don't give us empty words of comfort.

"Harry." He says. And it really does sound like he's been crying.

"What is it Severus?"

"I want you to stay with me in my rooms at Hogwarts."

"Alright Severus."

"And I want to kiss you again. Is that okay. Am I allowed to want that?" I smile at him.

"Of course Severus." His eyes dart to my lips again and I know what he's about to do.

When he initiates the kiss, it feels so much more coy that the previous one. I let him take the lead. Deepen it. Soften it. What ever he wants. I follow his pace. I don't like it less than our first kiss and I don't like it more. It's like the first kiss was perfect and this one is just as perfect. And I feel like our next will be just as perfect. And the next. And the next. And I want to experience all of them.

"Was... the second kiss good too?" I feel so embarrassed asking. His head is on my shoulder.

"I'm floating." Is all he says.

Chapter 29: Draco and Neville

Everyone knew and at the entrance ceremony that Severus and I were soul bonded. My entire house swarmed me with questions. I'm actually really thankful for Hermione and Ron. They headed off most of the questions. Or more to the point, told everyone to back off and let me breathe. To address the hippogriff in the room, Dumbledore made an announcement.

"I am sure all of you are aware of the bonding of our potion professor, Professor Snape and Harry Potter. Along with the rumors that Professor Snape has been working as a spy for the light. I am pleased to confirm those rumors. Mr. Potter will be staying in Professor Snape's chambers with him, but he will be attending his classes as per normal. I am sure some of you may be concerned about Mr. Potter potentially being shown favoritism, but rest assured, any assignments that young Harry may have to do for Professor Snape will be graded by another teacher."

When Dumbledore takes his seat at the head table, the chatter increases. Several Slytherins give me a cross look. Severus and I arrived a few days before the remainder of the students. This gave me time to speak with my other teachers and allow Hermione and Ron to speak with Severus.

It went decently. Ron still doesn't like Severus, but he has at least agreed to be civil. Severus seems to have the same truce for my friends. He can be polite. Or... as polite as possible. I still don't fully know what to expect for my final year. I'm scared. And maybe a bit excited.

After the meal, the first years are shown their way to their common rooms, and since both Ron and Hermione are prefects, they got to give the first years the tour.

I was more surprised when I was cornered. By two people in face. Draco Malfoy- less surprised about him- and Neville Longbottom- more surprised about him.

The two glance at each other; I have a feeling that both are here because of Severus.

Draco crosses his arms. "I'll wait until you two are done, I have a lot to say to Potter." He steps back just enough to give us privacy, but he can obviously still hear us. Neville doesn't seem to care. He's matured a lot since first year. He isn't pudgy or weak anymore.

"Harry, I just wanted to ask if you were serious about Professor Snape?" Before I have a chance to answer, he continues. "If you are serious that's fine. If you aren't serious but you need people to think you are, that's also fine. I guess all I'm trying to say is, if you need to talk, I'm here. And although I have had a lot of issues with Professor Snape in the past, if you are okay with him, then there must be some good in him." He smiles comfortingly and clasps me on the shoulder good-naturedly.

"Thank you. I know he has been really unfair to you in the past, but I think from here on out, he will treat all his student's fairly." He nods seemingly satisfied with my response.

"Alright. Then I'll let Draco talk with you. I need to go settle in anyways." Neville turns to the Slytherin boy and smiles in a very confident way. "Draco, he's all yours." This seems to make Draco uncomfortable, and he waits until Neville has left completely before turning to me. I almost wish he wouldn't have left, because it's very obvious that the two of us are completely alone.

"Potter." He says through his teeth. He isn't looking at me. "Do you actually care about my godfather?"

"Of course I do. We are soul bonded after all."

"Cut the shit. I'm serious right now. I know all about the death eater meetings. I know that you were only soul bonded because he is trying to keep you safe from the dark lord. Do you actually care about my godfather?" He turns to me and his eyes are piercing me. I feel like, even if I did lie, he would know. His eyes are scary.

"Draco. Just between you and me. Because I feel like you deserve to know. I was tricked into soul bonding with Severus. I didn't

understand that it was permanent because I was raised by muggles. Severus and I have had our highs and lows since we bonded, but I do actually care about him." He searching my face. "Draco. I'll deny it if you say anything, but I think I love him." He narrows his eyes.

"You are an idiot. What if I was sent by the Dark Lord to trick you. You just made yourself vulnerable."

"I know. But. It seemed like you were genuinely worried about Severus." Draco exhales.

"I was asked by my father and the dark lord to trick Severus or You into leaving the castle. If they capture you, then Severus will come. The dark lord wants you dead now more than ever. During the next Hogsmeade trip, you will have detention that you will be serving under Professor McGonagall, and Severus will be busy brewing potions for the medical wing. Do you understand?" He asks me.

"Draco. Why are you doing this." He looks down his nose at me.

"My godfather deserves to be happy. I'm willing to keep you alive if it means Severus gets to be happy. So, think of it more as you owe me Potter. Severus can no longer keep you safe by deceiving the dark lord. I do not like you Potter. I do not like anything about you. But I need for you to make my godfather happy."

"That's all I want to do right now Draco." He nods.

"I cannot be nice to you and I cannot be nice to my godfather because there are still those loyal to the dark lord that are watching me. I'm going to be cruel to both of you." He looks sick to his stomach. "So. I apologize in advance for that. Severus already knows and understands. He told me that I have to protect myself first, and until this war is over, I have to seem loyal to the dark lord."

"You aren't then?"

"Potter. I never was. It's difficult to be loyal to a man that has..." He stops talking.

"Draco. I know everything." I'm not sure how much he knows

though. So I will not volunteer any information about Princess.

"You know that they are considered to be in a relationship." He says testing the waters.

"Yes Draco. And I know that he threw you to a werewolf." Draco doesn't seem surprised. "So. You are on our side." He narrows his eyes angerly.

"No. I'm on Severus's side. I hate you and I hate the headmaster. But right now, you two are keeping him alive." No thanks to the headmaster.

"I promise Draco. I have no intention of hurting him."

"So you think you might love him." He says testing the words in his mouth.

"Please. Don't tell him that. Don't tell anyone. If you do, I'll deny it. But I want to make sure before I say anything to him. I do not want to scare him away." Draco nods.

"I'll keep your secret, and as insurance, I'll tell you something that I myself would deny. I also might be in love with someone." He smirks at me and crosses his arms dramatically. "But no one would believe you. I wouldn't believe you."

"Look Draco, I'm flattered but..."

"Not you, you pompous big-headed goody goody. It's Neville." He says the second part much quieter. "There. Now we are even. You keep my secret and I'll keep yours."

"I don't understand why you told me. I didn't ask, and I already had to trust you." Slowly he looks away from me.

"Perhaps I just wanted to be able to tell someone. After all. It isn't as though anything could ever come of it. I have to be cruel to him otherwise it would be obvious that he is my weak point. I have to pick on him. Call him names I don't want to call him."

"Have you... for a while?" He laughs lightly. Mournfully.

"Since first year. The fatso was just so pathetic. Some hopeful. And.." He shakes his head. "It doesn't matter. We are even now. I'll try to do what I can to warn the two of you without seeming suspicious." He rushes off to settle in and I'm left with my thoughts.

How many other students are just like him. Forced to fight a war their parents put them in.

Draco and Neville huh?

I guess I've heard of stranger couples. After all. I'm headed to my sour potion professor's room. I'm headed to my husband's and my room. And I'm not dreading sleeping next to him. In fact. I'm looking forward to pulling him against me.

So, who knows. Maybe if this war ever ends, I can play wingman for Draco.

Chapter 30: Telling the Slytherins

Severus had to meet with his first years just like every head of house does the first night, every year. He should be back soon. I've settled into our bed almost like it's natural. We do have an early day tomorrow, and he will insist that we get a good night's sleep. Ironic coming from him.

I'm a very light sleeper, so he wakes me up often. I haven't told him because I didn't want to concern him. But all throughout the night, he wakes up- which causes me to wake up. Normally I just lay there quietly until he goes back to sleep. We have an unspoken agreement.

I don't mention his nightmares.

And he doesn't mention mine.

So sometimes we will wake up at the same time from one of our dreams but I normally pretend that it didn't wake me up. I think he knows otherwise, but he hasn't called me out of it.

When he wakes up, normally he will curl against me. Sometimes tentatively- almost shyly- he will reach out and hold my hand. He normally sleeps very close to me. Having someone near helps him cope with his nightmares.

Our relationship is still awkward. We have kissed a couple of times. We sleep next to each other every night. We are technically married. I think Severus might want more from our relationship, and I'm pretty sure I do want more. Taking another step is terrifying though.

It would be so easy to accidently hurt him and I honestly don't think I have the tact to keep from screwing up. Severus deserves to be happy. Severus comes back clearly exhausted.

He removes his outer robes and leaving the rest on, more or less falls into bed.

"First years are very draining."

"Of course they are." I say lightly. Reflexively, I reach out to begin rubbing the knots in his body. I don't know why it feels natural, but it somehow does. So I apply lighter and firmer pressure where he needs it and this does the trick to calm him down. His body is almost like liquid with how relaxed he is.

"That feels good." He says huskily. I'm not even sure if he realizes how he sounds. Either way, two things happen simultaneously. The first is that I begin massaging him more deliberately and the second is, my body decides that right now is the time to get hard. I blame his voice. It's naturally deep to start with, add a hint of appreciation to the voice, and he sounds like he's in the middle of having sex.

I swallow and try to calm myself.

"Harry. Please. A bit lower?" He relaxes into the bed. I can feel his heart race under my palms even though his tone is calm. So, I rub lower on his back trying to remind myself that I do have some control.

Every touch between us has been hesitant thus far. Neither of us are very confident in touching or being touched. More often than not, we give each other ample space. A casual touch here or there, but they are short lived. Or it's something like stroking his hair. He likes that. He likes gentle touching. Soft. Innocent. The relaxed back seems to tense up again all of a sudden. My hands falter. Was it starting to hurt maybe? I thought I was doing it the same way though.

"Harry." He's quiet. He sounds embarrassed. "You have to stop. I'm... it got me..." I pause to give him time to think of his wording. "My body is... I am.." He seems to go back and forth not able to decide on what to say. But I understand what he isn't comfortable saying.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to get you..."

"No no. it's not your fault. I know you were just trying to be nice. I don't know why my body suddenly became..." He's ears are pink.

"Draco really cares about you." I say instead of addressing the real subject right now.

"Yes." He says simply, then goes on to elaborate. "Draco has always been very fond of me. There was a time that I believed his father to be something of a friend. He is not of course. But there was a time in my life where I believed he was. I did not have much of a family to speak of and he essentially took me under his wing. He will always be loyal to the dark lord. Cissy however. I believe she is only loyal to the dark lord because he husband is and at this point, she is afraid that Draco may be harmed if she did anything against the dark lord. Every since the dark lord tried to kill Draco, Cissy has stopped believing in the cause."

"Should we trust her then?"

"Absolutely not. Harry. I believe Cissy may actually be fond of me because she knows I care for Draco, but she is a mother first." He smiles softly. "She's a good mother." In a rare show of affection, he curls against my side. "Harry. I am acutely familiar with what she would do to keep her son safe." His eyes are closed. "Harry. If something happens. If it looks like the light will be unable to survive this war, then I want you to go into hiding."

"Severus, I can't just run away forever." He opens his eyes and my blood runs cold. Those intense eyes could hypnotize me.

"I have an account with a muggle bank. It's enough to survive on for a reasonable length of time if you aren't foolish with the money. You would have to use your magic sparingly, but Niffy could help. I don't care if the whole of the wizarding world is killed off. Harry, I need for you to live. We are living in dangerous times. Should I somehow be captured, do not try to rescue me. I know that he will not kill me. He cares for me to much for that. But as long as I'm alive, I can keep him from using the scar to track you. Niffy knows of a safe house that I have had for a while- no one knows of it. I need you to swear to me that you will stay safe."

"Severus, I'm sure that..."

"Swear to me Harry." He cuts me off. "I know you are prone to stupidity, or bravery as you Gryffindor's like to say, but if you go into hiding, then you will have the ability to become stronger. If you act foolishly, then there will be no chance. There is too much on your shoulder for your age. If it comes down to it, I need for you to be safe." I stroke his hair, but I don't promise.

I could never put my well being over his. I know that I couldn't. And what about everyone else that I care about. I can't leave them to potential death.

"Severus." I say softly. He turns facing away from me. I don't think he's actually upset with me though. "You know I couldn't do that."

"I know." He whispers. "But I'm afraid that it's likely to come down to that. He is determined, and although he doesn't have the strength that he once did, I am not sure that you have the abilities to defeat him."

"I'm afraid too Severus." I wrap my arm around his middle and pull him back against me. "I do not want to think about you going back to him. I do not want to think about you being hurt again."

He's gained a bit of weight. Not much, but some. He still has a lot more that he needs to put on to be considered a healthy weight, but it's a start. Not having the stress of spying seems to keep his stomach more settled. Not to mention not being violated.

"We should sleep." Severus says. "We both have a long day tomorrow."

"You never told me. How did your Slytherins take the news of you actually being bonded to me?"

"I really only spoke with the first years. I am sure that many of my older Slytherins will lose respect for me, but the young ones were to overwhelmed by their new environment to show their opinions about this. I will know more within a week how trifling my Slytherins are going to be about our relationship."

I press the bridge of my nose against the back of his neck.

I don't know how I know, maybe it's because I've been around him for awhile now, but I know he's worried about this. I can feel the anxiety washing over him in waves.

"I'm sure there will be Slytherins on both sides I say." I can't lie to him. There are going to be some that lose all respect for him and there will be those that do not care one way or another. Maybe even a few like Draco that are happy for him. I'm not really sure. Either way... "Either way Severus, I'll be here."

Chapter 31: So he is a teacher

Draco is incredible. If I thought he was a nuisance before, then I've been corrected. Knowing that he's doing what he must to survive doesn't make it much better. Sometimes I see other students giving him strange looks, and I know what they must be thinking. That's he's violated me. It's obvious from the way he's stared at that most people have already decided on their own opinions. I try to not let it bother me. Severus says that it's to be expected. No matter how much he cleans his act up, he's done to much to be easily trusted.

I try to not let it bother me.

But I can tell it bothers Severus, so it bothers me.

Sure, he may say that he doesn't care. He may say that he knows the truth and the important ones know the truth, but of course it bothers him. He's put himself at risk to keep these ungrateful....

But I was once one of those ungrateful undisciplined brats. I was once one of his students that he put himself in harms way for. And I wasn't grateful.

Severus doesn't hold back anymore with students. He takes points from all the houses and he is still one of the strictest teachers. He's still crass. He's still unwavering. But it's different. At least I can see how it's different. He isn't doing it out of maliciousness, but his classroom has the potential to be more dangerous than any other. We need to know how to shield ourselves. We need to know how to not make stupid mistakes.

"Mr. Longbottom, you are to remain after class." Neville doesn't seem even the least bit concerned or afraid. In fact, he simply nods and continues the assignment. He's matured a lot since last term. His awkwardness is almost nonexistent, and he seems to have more confidence in himself. "Ms. Vance, mincing is not the same as chopping. If you do not know the difference, then ask your partner. If he does not know the difference then both of you are to stay after

class." Over the course of the class session, Severus calls out several names and informs them to stay after class. He never says for detention and there is never any heat in his voice.

He sounds completely nonchalant. But still. Some students flinch when their names are called. I'm not surprised when my name is one of the ones called. After all, he only seems to be calling out the lower performing students.

Other students pack up, but nearly half of the class remains. Once the students that are free to leave completely exit the classroom, Severus sit comfortably on top of his desk. I can tell from his body language how lax he is now. He isn't hiding behind pretenses. He isn't pretending to be more or less harsh than he actually is.

"I have asked each of you to stay behind because each of you fall far from the class average. Many of you have struggled in potions since first year and some of you have only began struggling in recent years. Regardless. I will be holding remedial classes for students that need additional help. Students from all years are permitted, and anyone is welcome to attend. We will be meeting here, after dinner in the great hall on Wednesdays. Naturally there is only so much space, therefore I am letting the students that need the remedial lessons the most secure their spot first. As this is outside of normal school hours, it is completely optional and the environment will be more casual to allow students to ask any questions they need too. Please let me know if any of you are interested before the next time we meet. If you do not let me know then I cannot guarantee that there will be a seat available."

Everyone is quiet. Maybe not sure what to say. Casually, Severus crosses his legs.

"Each and everyone one of you have the ability to perform well in this class. Up until now, teaching was not my primary concern. If the content did not come easily to the students, then they were left behind. It's too late to completely right that wrong, but I can give each of you the opportunity to have the teacher that my students deserved. I cannot say that the remedial lessons will be easy. For some of you that require little additional assistance, it will only help marginally. For some of you it will be much more difficult but

as I said, this is completely optional." He looks to each of us again. "You are dismissed." He says.

Some students leave immediately. Some hover by the door. It's actually Neville that goes up to him first. I can hear him saying that he will attend the lessons, but then he starts speaking much quieter. Severus nods. His dark eyes are almost like liquid. It's not pity in his eyes, but it's something just as strong. I'm not sure what though.

After Neville, more students seem to feel confident going up to him. Like they are slowly realizing that he's not secretly a vampire. He will not bite their heads off. The more that talk to him, the more that the other students relax enough to go up to him as well. I'm the last student remaining.

"Professor Snape, is there still room for me." He swallows nervously.

"Yes Mr. Potter. There is still available room for you. Can I expect to see you at the lessons?"

"You didn't have to do all this." I say instead of answering the question. "I know you feel guilty that you didn't do more, but you didn't have to do this."

"Yes, I did." He says. "I was once in their shoes. I once didn't have a teacher or a head of house that was invested in me. It felt like everyone had given up on me. I had my few talents, but beyond that, I was mediocre. It is my job to protect my students, teach my students, and guide my students."

I smile at him. He really is a beautiful person. A deeply jaded person who has been harmed too much, but beautiful nonetheless. Or at least... I think he is.

"Come on Severus." At the use of his first name he seems to relax. "We have time before dinner. Let's go relax in our room."

I want to snog him senseless.

And once we get to our room, I do. His lips. His tongue. It's like I want to devour them. He's slowly getting use to me kissing him, and I can tell he likes it. For as difficult as Severus normally is to

understand, in this way he's easy. He only wants to be treated softly. To have me lightly cup his cheek. Or hold his hand. Embrace him. He enjoys the kissing because I move slow. I don't deepen the kisses too quickly. And he always has the ability to push me away. Which is more often than not how our bout of snogging ends.

Like right now.

His palms are pushed against my chest to firmly keep me an arms-length away. He's trying to regain his breath. He's also trying to hide the fact that he's completely aroused. It's common for him to become excited when we make out.

"Harry. We have to stop." He sounds completely desperate to continue.

"We don't have to Severus." He looks up at me. For a brief moment a flash of fear twists his features. I don't comment on it though because I do not want to make him feel embarrassed over a feeling that is completely natural. It doesn't bother me that he's afraid. Strike that. It completely bothers me, but I'm not upset with him over it. I understand. The idea of intimacy can be scary even to those that haven't been hurt like he has and like I have. "Severus, we don't have to stop. But we also don't have to continue."

I squeeze his hand in what I hope is a comforting way.

"Harry. I don't know what to say." I give him a smile and this seems to help him relax.

"Severus. We are bonded. Legally I'm at an age where I can consent. And I do. We don't have to do anything we don't want to do. But if there is something you want..." I pause and search his face for anything. "Severus. I am your husband. If there is something you want then I want you to tell me. Just because you or I want something doesn't mean we have to act on it."

He nods slowly and I kiss his temple. It's chaste, but it makes my point. Sex. No sex. It doesn't matter.

"It's nearly time for dinner." He says looking away from me.

"Severus, I'm not afraid of you. If you are afraid of me, then that's fine for now, but I'm not afraid of you."

"Harry, I know you are at the age where you are interested in sex." He pulls his knees up to his chest. "You deserve to explore your sexuality and figure out what exactly you like. Unfortunately, you were saddled with... well with me." His arms loop around his legs holding them closer to himself. "Harry. I am not afraid of you." I'm waiting for the but. "But. I am afraid of being touched. I hate to admit it. I'm ashamed to admit it. But it's just the truth. Admittedly, being touched by you is arousing. A part of me isn't against being touched intimately. But another part just isn't comfortable."

I lay down on my side and pull him down beside me. Comfortably he molds against my chest and his eyes close.

I stroke his hair and the little tension I felt in his body vanishes. This is something 'safe'.

"Severus. Can I get you off?" I let the silence build for a moment before continuing. "I do not want to live a life where I'm afraid of touching someone I care about just because my uncle forced me to do things. I would like to be able to give you pleasure. Whether that be stroking you. Or maybe sucking you off." My mouth feels dry all of a sudden. It's embarrassing to talk like this, but I want to be clear. "Please don't think I'm trying to pressure you. If you aren't ready for anything like that, then that's completely fine. I don't think less of you if you aren't ready."

"Harry. I don't have anything to offer in return. I'm not comfortable with being penetrated. I don't want that. Not right now. Maybe not ever."

"I'm not talking about us making love Severus. We can move as slow as you want. I'm talking about letting me relieve some of your pent-up need. You are hard right now. And you never get off. If you were willing to let me help you, you might feel a bit better. I don't expect anything in return Severus."

"But why don't you. It doesn't make any sense." My fingers twist into his dark hair.

"Because I care about you. That's the only reason I need."

Chapter 32: It's Something

It's completely dark. It reminds me of the night we consummated our bond. It's completely dark.

He wanted the lights off. He didn't want to be seen. I don't remind him that I've seen him naked a few times already. I don't remind him that I know about the scars or how thin he is. I just let him have this security blanket. I think he's just embarrassed to be seen with anything less than complete control. It's hard to say why Severus wants particular things, but I'm willing to oblige him. If it makes him feel more comfortable.

So, we are in the dark. On our shared bed. It's difficult to blindly search, but moving slowly, I manage to not hurt either of us.

"You don't have to do this." He says. My hand reaches out until I feel his leg. Carefully, I travel up his leg until my hand is securely on his hip.

"No Severus. You don't have to do this. If you do not want me too, then you need to tell me now." He stays quiet. Deliberately, both of my hands grab his hips. "If you don't stop me, then I'm going too. I want too. But if you aren't ready..." Again, he's quiet. "I know you are pent up. It'll feel good for you."

"I'm sure it will Harry. But I'm not your uncle. I don't want to be someone that takes advantage of you."

"Severus, I'm the one that suggested this. I would like to make you feel good. I'm making the choice myself. You aren't pressuring me or taking advantage. It's something I honestly want to do." His bare skin actually feels soft. He's slightly cool to the touch- not in an unpleasant way. He's actually normally cold. The dungeons are so much colder than I previously thought.

He undressed in the dark. Clearly, he didn't want me to see even though I already have. I can feel his body lightly tremoring. I can

hear him breathing. Faster than normal and partly panicky. So, I wait for him to calm down because I understand.

"It's okay Severus." He's sitting at the edge of the bed and I'm on the ground between his legs. It's easy to find his hands and gently I grasp them. "I want to do this, but only if you also want me too." I'm trying to sound confident so that he knows he can rely on me. "Severus, I'm making a choice for myself. I would like to be intimate with my husband. I'm nervous, but this is what I want. But I also want you to want this. If you don't that is okay. If you aren't interested in this, that's also okay. We have both been through a lot. I don't expect either of us to be confident the first time."

My eyes are starting to adjust and I can see the outline of him. I'm not sure how well he can see me.

"Harry." All he says is my name. And then the silence completely grows between us. I watch as his hands tentatively reach out to lay on top of my head. Both hands thread through my hair nervously. He isn't so much forcing me as silently consenting.

"Are you sure Severus? If you aren't sure, then that's okay."

"I might change my mind in the middle. I really don't know. Harry all of this is new to me."

"Me too Severus. All you have to do is stop me. We can go at our own pace." I casually place my hands on his hips. "Did he ever...?"

"The submissive partner should only receive pleasure from being used. He was not in the habit of doing things for my pleasure." He speaks slowly. "But I... for him many times. He liked to see me on my knees for him." He's shaking again. "I don't want to be like him." He says after a short pause. His hands are abruptly trying to pull away, but I lay my hands over top his. The position is awkward, but I manage to calm him.

"Severus, I am choosing to be here. I may not have understood the bond in the beginning, but I chose to become close to you. I chose to save you. I chose to share a room with you. I chose to care about you. And Severus, I chose to trust you. I've made my choice, all you

have to do is make yours. Do you want me to touch you?"

"I.. I do." He sounds hesitant. He sounds afraid. He sounds embarrassed. But his hands are firmly on my head and showing no signs of leaving.

"I'm going to touch you Severus." I move slowly. I know that's what I would want in his situation. Hands again, on his hips. I kiss his inner thigh and when he exhales I kiss there again. Lightly I nip at the soft skin slowly making my way to his neglected erection. I'm not surprised that he's shy about this. I'm not surprised that he's nervous about this.

He makes a sound almost like a squeak when my lips close around the head of his erection. I suck very lightly and simultaneously two things happen. The shock caused him to jerk forward suddenly and then he came before he could stop himself. Hands push me off of him and he backs further on the bed away from me.

"I didn't mean too." He assures quickly. It's obvious from his tone that he isn't sure what my reaction is going to be. It's almost like he's afraid of what I'll say.

"It's okay Severus." I close the gap between us and embrace him. "These things are bound to happen, I just surprised you and you reacted on instinct." I ease him on his side and pull the blanket over us. We are spooning and my arm protectively lays over him. "It was my first time wanting to make someone feel good. I was nervous."

"I didn't mean to cum in your mouth. Or to choke you." I can feel his heart pounding.

"It's alright Severus. I'm not upset. We aren't experienced with this, there is going to be some awkward moments." I am disappointed that It didn't last longer. I underestimated how new this would be to him. It's ironic. In the past. With my uncle. I would do everything I could to get him to finish as quickly as possible. But with Severus. I'm not upset with him. It's not that. I'm just disappointed that I didn't get to make him feel good longer. I'm disappointed that this left him feeling awkward. That isn't what I wanted. I didn't want this to be a negative experience.

"You are still erect." He says in a hushed whisper. Almost as if he's asking me what he should do. I already told him. That wasn't necessary.

"Sorry, I would like to hold you a bit longer. Let me just get a pillow to put between us." But he holds my arm. "I can't help that I'm hard right now, but I want to hold you a bit longer please."

"That isn't what I meant. You made me... finish, but you are..."

"Severus, you don't have to worry about that. I told you that I don't need anything in return." His hand is shaking as it holds mine. "You don't have to do anything that you do not want to do." He's mostly under the covers as he turns towards me. Instead of looking at me though, he presses his face into my chest. I can feel him tentatively rub against me. And when I don't say anything, he repeats the action.

"I don't know what you want from me." He says tiredly. "It's so easy to play the role that I'm expected to play. I just have to be what other's want me to be. I just have to give them what they want. But I don't know what you want." He lets me wrap my arm over him. For a moment we both just lay underneath the covers. Him entirely naked and me erect. I'm not sure what to say to him. "I don't know what you want from me. I don't know what you expect from me." I feel words catch in my throat.

I swallow them down and try to sound more confident than I really feel right now.

"I don't want anything from you. I don't have any expectations about how you should or shouldn't act. Just do whatever you want. Be however you want. That's good enough. I'm not going to be just another person controlling you. We are bonded. So we are trapped to each other, but that doesn't mean you have to pretend to be something you aren't. If you aren't okay being touched then tell me. If you are. Then tell me. If you want more... want less... Severus. Anything."

His body is pressed flush against mine. His long arms hold me securely while I hold him just as tightly. His long body is curled

against mine in a submissive manner, and I can feel his hardness against my own. I have to fight to keep from cuming at the gentle but deliberate grinding.

"I'm scared." He whispers as if it's a secret that he'd held deep in his chest forever, and I remain quiet as if silently letting him know that I'll hold that secret just at tight. He lets me stroke his hair, and I let him lower my pants. It feels good. Skin against skin shyly presses together. "Is this okay?" He again whispers. And no amount of words can fully express how 'okay' this is. Nothing has ever felt so incredible. So perfect. So, I settle for the only word that my vocal cords can manage to produce.

"Yes." I kiss the top of his head. "But you don't have to do this Severus." His hands are shaking.

"Is it okay if this is what I want?" His hands clutch the fabric still on my shoulders. "Does it make me bad. You are so much younger than me. I'm your teacher. I've been cruel to you. I've been broken so much that no relationship with me could ever be easy. Is it okay that I want this?"

"Everyone deserves to be happy Severus. You are long overdue. Our relationship isn't conventional, but I'm not disappointed that you are my husband." I have to keep from groaning when he pulls away from me. I'm willing to stop here if he doesn't want to continue, but I can't deny that I'm aching.

"I'm not ready for sex. I may never be." He turns his back to me. "But I would like to try something." He sounds shy and not fully confident with himself. He settles back against me. His back is pressed against my chest, and I can see enough of his face to know that he's blushing. His legs are pressed tightly together as my erection slides between his thighs. It feels so good that I thrust forward instinctively before I can stop myself.

"I'm sorry Severus. I didn't mean to do that." I'm trying to go slow for him. I'm trying to not push to quickly. Instead of withdrawing like I was afraid of though, he actually laughs.

"These things are bound to happen, I just surprised you and you

reacted on instinct." He repeats what I told him earlier. "Harry. Is this okay?" He asks me. And how could it be anything but okay. My hand lightly on his hip. My erection sliding against his as his soft thighs squeeze around me.

"It feels incredible Severus." He let's me move with him and before either of us realize it, both of us are moaning contently.

For a brief moment, it doesn't matter that we were forced into this bond. It doesn't matter that we are in a war. It doesn't matter that our entire lives we've been controlled. It doesn't matter that we have both been abused. It doesn't matter that nightmares haunt even our daylight or that life itself has been unfair to us. Because for one brief moment everything is perfect.

He's moaning sweetly in a way that I never thought he could sound. And my hands are groping his chest as his long beautiful hands squeeze us together. I can only thrust between his legs faster. And I need him. I need to touch more. I need to hear his moans and his pleas for more. Most of all, I need to hear his climax. And I work us to our finish faster than I should.

I should delay this. I should prolong this bliss, but my body is too inexperienced to know how to restrain myself when he's obviously feel so much pleasure. I wouldn't dare continue if he wasn't making such beautiful intoxicating sounds, but he is.

"H.. Harry." My name comes out of his mouth like a plea and his hands stroke us faster. He can't hold off much longer. My hand squeezes over his.

"Are you close?" I ask. Even though I already know the answer. Instead of voicing his answer, he nods quickly and whines like he doesn't know what to do with himself. "Me too. It feels good. Just a bit more."

I watch in rapture as his mouth hangs open even as no sound comes out. His orgasm shakes him completely and I join him. As our bodies spasm and both of our cum mixes on his stomach he calls out my name. And I call out his. We don't question about after because that has no place in these moments. Instead we allow each

other to slowly come down from our euphoric high.

Even as he limply collapses against my chest, we stay pressed together not even thinking about separating. His tired eyes ease close and I can't help but smile.

Chapter 33: I messed up

Severus is a good teacher. It's actually a shame that he's been unable to fully commit to teaching until now. No one would call him lenient. And no one would say he's an easy teacher. But at least now, he's fair. The tutoring has actually helped many students that would have otherwise failed. Neville of all people actually does well now that it's been explained differently. It actually makes me smile hearing Severus explain something he's passionate about in different ways. He hasn't said it, but I can tell he's found a new excitement in teaching. He spends time searching for different ways to reach his students.

With me, he compares it to cooking. Certain ingredients are stronger. Certain ones pair well with others.

With Neville, he compares it to herbology. From the moment Severus started explaining it in that way to him, it's like a lightbulb went off. He started doing so well that some students actually accused him of cheating... Cheating?! Neville of all people. I think it also helps that he's not afraid of Severus anymore. That doesn't mean that everyone has come around to the new Severus. As we predicted, some of his Slytherins have lost all respect for him. Draco is mean on a daily basis, but Severus understands that survival has to come first. He told me that many of his students that are loudly against him, are likely also trying to keep themselves safe. They can't choose their families. They can only try to keep themselves safe. Self-preservation. I believe this is something that Severus knows very well.

Severus and I are careful. We don't leave the castle- and neither do Ron or Hermione for safety reasons. Other than that, most everything carries on as usual. I still play quidditch. Severus still brews copious amounts of potions for the medical wing. He teaches, I try to learn. And at night.

At night.

It's difficult to keep from touching him during the day. I'm sure it's hormones. I'm a hormonal teenager that happens to be married. And until now, I've more or less suppressed any desires because of the stuff my uncle did to me. Maybe suppressed isn't the right word. More correctly would be to say, I didn't have any desires. It's almost strange that I do now. I blame Severus for that. Okay. Blame is the wrong word. But it is because of Severus.

Maybe it's because he understands what it's like for something that is suppose to be a positive thing... to be twisted. Maybe that's why. Or maybe it's because he wants so little. And I think that's the saddest thing of all. For years. His whole like more likely... He's been beaten down. And all he wants is something that most would consider insignificant. Because they already have it. He just wants someone to look at him like he's something special. To treat him like he's worthy of being cared for.

But I messed up.

I know that the plan was for him to bond with me to keep me safe. I know he views himself as a pawn. I know most of the light views him as a pawn. He exists more or less to keep me alive. And I have no doubt that he would die to keep me safe. Even though I don't want that. But I know now what the plan was... even though no one actually told me.

I was supposed to keep hating him. I was supposed to view him as the 'pawn he is'. I was supposed to see him as disposable. Even this bonding. When the war ends, if he still managed to be alive... he would... stop being alive so that I could be free of this bonding. Evil ugly cruel Snape was the image that I was allowed to see. That's all anyone was allowed to see. I had to view him as expendable, or at the very least, I had to hate him.

He knew that. And I believe Dumbledore knew that.

If I hated him then I wouldn't care if he died. I wouldn't try to save him. If I hated him, then he could protect me without the worry of me protecting him.

But I messed up.

I did the unthinkable. I actually got to know him for the beautiful man he is.

I messed up.

I fell in love with him.

Not that I can say that to his face yet. I'm not quite ready for that. I've never been in love before, but I'm sure that wasn't part of the plan to keep the boy who lived alive. I messed up.

And I'm glad I did.

Someone needed to love him. He deserves that much. He deserves so much more.

He wants so little that I'm afraid if I fail to give it to him then it might break him. And the hardest part about that is, he doesn't ask for anything. He's the type to silently beg to be held. But he will never ask. He will not ask to be embraced. He will not ask to be kissed. Cherished. Loved. He could never bring himself to ask to be loved. So instead he opts for pretending or worse yet, possibly believing he doesn't deserve love.

At night, I hold him. Some nights he is overcome by waves of pleasure. And some nights he is overcome by waves of shame and fear. On those nights he doesn't let me touch him. This isn't something that *poof* he will be cured. This is part of him. A deep-rooted fear to be touched to harshly or more terrifying to be touched to gently.

I hurt him once without realizing. He wanted me to stop. But I didn't. Because I didn't know. So I just continued to touch him. And he said nothing. When I looked at his face it was obvious that he wasn't comfortable. And of course, I stopped immediately. I asked him why he didn't tell me to stop. Why didn't he just tell me that he didn't want to be touched and he couldn't answer me. It's like he was ashamed to suddenly become afraid when a moment ago he wasn't.

This is just part of him. I understand. Some days. It's like he's

unburdened. He's free of any fear or insecurities. On other days. On other days... suffice to say it's the exact opposite. I understand it.

The light is always off when he does let me touch him. I'm not sure if he's afraid for me to see the scars, afraid for me to see him if he becomes afraid, or afraid for me to see him if he feels pleasure. It's like he's afraid to allow himself to be happy.

But I understand that too.

I don't want to hurt him, but I'm afraid that I'm too tactless to keep him uninjured. He only wants to be touched gently. Softly. Lovingly. Held close like nothing else exists.

He likes to submissively curl against me while we sleep. In the beginning, he was shy and very tentative. He would slowly ease into my side as if it were a coincidence. Now he doesn't show any such hesitance. His head will lay on my chest as his body curls up against my side. It's progress.

He wants so little.

And I want so much.

I want for us to actually have sex. I want to touch him and take him and love him. Properly. I want to hear him scream out my name. We haven't have sex since the night we first 'consummated the bond'.

I'm not angry with him or anything of the sort. I understand. I can be patient. I would never pressure him. But that doesn't change the fact that I still *want* him. Not that I can be fully honest about that with him. I try to sound nonchalant. Like I'm not looking at him everyday thinking how I want to get him to bed.

And then I feel bad.

I do not want to be like Voldemort. I do not want to take from Severus the little peace he has found.

Tonight I visited my friends in the Gryffindor common room. Ron and Hermione all really into the whole couple thing. I honestly feel

like a third wheel around them, but I am happy for them. We study together. Laugh. It's not the same anymore. It's different. In a way that says- we can never go back. Not necessarily bad different... just different. I'm bonded and they are honestly likely to be together for the rest of their lives. It isn't the same.

Nothing is the same.

I go back to my room because it's getting close to curfew. I try to be a model student because I do not want it to look poorly on Severus. In our room, sitting in his chair, Severus is curled up with a book that has obviously fallen to the floor.

His knees are pulled cozily against him as he is fully curled up in his chair. He must have been waiting for me and fell asleep. It isn't that late, but he has been more tired lately. I think it's because of our bond. I've felt no pain from my scar. I know he is suppressing my pain and taking it on himself. When I confronted him about it... he lied to me.

Because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter that I love him. It doesn't matter that we have made progress in our relationship. It doesn't matter that I would die for him.

I would never get the chance.

Because I'm his king and he's just a lowly pawn ready to put himself between me and the enemy.

Chapter 34: Groups

Diced. Not chopped. Stirred slowly for ten minutes. Potion brewing is about minor details. Each action is equally important to the next. The classroom is actively listening to Severus teaching. They are actively listening to his words of caution. How easily it is to mess up because one acted to hastily. We are broken up in teams. Only this time, we were instructed differently. Normally we are permitted to choose any partner we desire, but this time there was one stipulation. Choose any partner, but they must be in a house different from our own. This being a class of Gryffindor and Slytherins, no one had much choice.

Ron and Hermione were forced to separate and choose someone other than each other for a partner and I was faced with wondering who I should pair with. I wasn't really sure. It was actually Draco who grabbed me up. The number of potential partners were dwindling and he sat next to me and glared, daring me to question him.

The glare only made me laugh. After all. One of the few Gryffindor's left was Neville and I know exactly why he doesn't want to pair with him. It's only then that I noticed that Neville is actually the last remaining student. It's an odd number.

Severus notices then and restraining a grin instructs Neville to pair with Draco and myself. I laughed when Draco turned his glare to Severus.

"Professor Snape," He says icily. "I really don't think it fair that I'm outnumbered." This doesn't faze Severus at all. In fact, he smirks.

"It can't be helped. There is an odd number. Think of it as a chance to broaden your horizons and become familiar with student you normally wouldn't." He addresses the rest of the class. "There is bad blood between these two houses more so than any other house at Hogwarts. In the past, I have overlooked this and even encouraged it. Times are changing. In my classroom, consider yourselves

unaffiliated with your houses." He writes out the page number for the instructions and the three of us get started. Neville inspects each ingredient and makes sure that it is of good quality. He's the best for that task. I begin to process each ingredient that Neville gives the okay on. Chopping. Dicing. Shredding. I can do that. And Draco. He has natural understanding.

Severus told me once that knowing the process will only get a student a part of the way there. The air pressure. Humidity. Quality of ingredients. Substitutions. That comes from experience and a deep understanding. Draco has that. He doesn't follow the directions, he only uses them as a guide and it reminds me of the half blood prince's potion text... Severus's old potion text book. The directions only get a student a part of the way there.

Our potion is one of the best.

At the end of class as everyone is packing up, Severus's clear voice cuts through the clatter.

"Get comfortable in your groups. You will each remain with that partner for the remainder of the school year." Some students grumble, but for the most part everyone quietly nods and then leaves.

I stay behind because it's my last class for the day, and Draco stays behind.

"I can't believe you." Draco says angerly. "How do you expect me to stand working with him. It's difficult enough to be in the same school." Severus smiles and easy light half grin.

"Mr. Longbottom had to be placed in a group and it seemed most practical to put someone known to be the weakest in potions with one of the best."

"That's not why you did it and you know that." Severus laughs carefreely and it makes my chest ache. He should always look like that. Eyes wrinkles from laughing. Mouth pulled into a wide smile. Perfect. "I can't deal with being that close to him." Draco says seriously. "I might end up jumping him."

"I'm sure you will be able to manage, and Harry will help you I'm sure." Draco groans childishly and their interaction reminds me of a child with their parent.

"I don't want to have to insult him. But if he does something adorably awkward I'm going to have to insult him." And that's the shame of it all. Because Draco is in an unfair situation.

"Then don't." I say, and both turn to me. "Just be mean to me. I'm also in the group after all. If you have to insult him, then just do something half hearted and say something worse about me. It won't bother me and that way you don't have to say anything you do not want to say to Neville." Draco and Severus look between each other.

"Just accept it Dra, he's a Gryffindor. He has the uncontrollable urge to save and help everybody." They nod and lightly tease me for being... well... a Gryffindor. But it doesn't bother me. Because I see it for what it is.

In the next second, the air is heavy again.

"You know it will not work. Slytherins and Gryffindors detest each other. Building bridges between them will not end this war. The dark lord Is still very active. He is watching everyone, and he will find a way to 'rescue' you."

I'm about to protest. Severus isn't going to return to him but instead Severus starts talking.

"I know he will find a way. He's a powerful man. We can only prepare though. Do what you have to in order to stay safe. If you need to be put in detention then you know what to do." Draco nods.

"I know godfather." Draco turns to me. "You're going to regret volunteering to be a punching bag." He already has to insult me anyways. Might as well accept it.

"Don't worry Draco, I can take anything you throw at me." As soon as we are alone, Severus leans against me. "You're really fond of him."

"Yes. I am." He says. "He's like that kid... I never had." I don't bring

up Princess because I get it. His eyes close and he more or less falls against my body. "Princess was never mine. Even though she was, she wasn't." He says as if reading my thoughts. Hell. He's talented enough, maybe he is. "I wanted her to be mine, but I wasn't an appropriate guardian." I want to stop him and tell him that he was more than suitable. I want to tell him that Dumbledore was the one that was wrong. I want to get angry for him because it seems like he's gone past anger and straight to acceptance. I want to march down to Dumbledore's office and demand to know where that little girl- who's around my age- is.

But it will not fix the situation. She would be in danger. And although it's not fair to Severus, she could be in a loving home. I don't know what to do in this situation, so I just embrace him.

"You love her. That's the only thing that matters. You love her and took good care of her." He hums slowly and his nerves seem to decrease.

"It's best for her that she isn't involved with me. Harry, please go ahead and eat with your friends in the great hall. There are still some things I must attend to." He's dismissing me. Right now, he isn't speaking to me as one husband to another. He's speaking to me as a teacher to a student. I want to refuse and ask him about the shift, but I don't because it will not help matters right now.

So I kiss his cheek and do as he's asked me. I'll ask him about it tonight. If I can get to him before he's fallen asleep. He's been so tired lately that as soon as the day settles, he just falls asleep. I'm a bit concerned, but he seems mostly normal the rest of the time. And he doesn't voice complaints about being so tired. So I'm not really sure if this is normal for him or not.

Ron and Hermione are talking. And I'm happy just spending time with them, but it's not lost of me how they have something different than what all three of us had. It isn't the same and that bothers me a little bit, but at the same time. It isn't the same with me either.

They aren't excluding me. It's nothing like that. I'm just not part of the group anymore. They are a group and I'm a group. It isn't the three of us... it's the two of us. Them. And me.

Again. I'm happy for them. They found happiness in this awful war. But now. I spend more time with Severus than anyone.

And that doesn't bother me.

It bothers me that they think it would bother me.

"What do the two of you even have to talk about. Other than potions. Or dark arts." Hermione asks- genuinely curious.

Ron's face twists. "Assuming it's talking that you blokes do to pass the time." I shake my head.

"We actually have a lot in common." Ron seems offended on my behalf. I notice several other students pretending they aren't listening in. But I just don't care anymore. "Professor Snape is actually a surprisingly nice person. He just doesn't always know how to express that." I want to bite each of their heads off. Because I know what they are thinking. And I do not like it.

And I think the reason I hate it so much, is because I use to be on their side.

I know what they are thinking because I once thought the same thing.

Chapter 35: The walls have ears

Severus is feigning ignorance. Pretending that he doesn't know what I'm talking about when I say that he's always exhausted. He shrugs me off anytime I ask him any questions. He's always busy. But during class or during the tutoring sessions, he behaves normal. Or his new normal I should say. He guides us through the lesson and I can tell just from looking around that less students are lost. We are encouraged to help one another, and we must always work in our groups. Draco and Neville don't speak to one another. It's too be expected I guess. I understand why Draco will not talk to Neville, and Neville... Well since first year, Draco has been a prat to Neville. I'm not surprised if Neville will have nothing to do with him.

Come to think of it.

Has Draco liked Neville ever since first year? The way he always picked on the once pudgy boy, it would make sense.

Draco keeps up pretenses. On the surface, it really does look like he hates me. In actuality though, when we are able to talk without any onlookers, we get along fairly well. It's almost scary how easy it is to talk to him.

"Everything would have been different if you would have taken my hand." He said. "My goal was to recruit you. It's for the best that you didn't take my hand but had you everything would have been different." It's easy to talk to him. It's easy to talk about things I would never feel comfortable telling my friends. I try to remind myself to protect myself though. But it's clear that Severus trusts him, and that makes me trust him.

"So if you aren't loyal to you-know-who, does that mean you are loyal to Dumbledore." He grimaces.

"No." He says. "In this war, many are on the side of who they

believe is the lesser of two evils. I would not say that I am loyal to either, but if I were to answer honestly, I believe the dark lord is the lesser of two evils. True, he detests muggles, but he is lenient against witches and wizards that are not pure blood if they show talent. Severus is only a half blood, but the dark lord still cares for him. And he isn't the only non-pureblood in our ranks." He's dicing potion ingredients. Draco is 'in detention' and I'm assisting my husband by preparing ingredients. Severus stepped out of the room a few hours ago and we are mostly unsupervised since this isn't real detention. These are really the only moments that Draco and I get to talk without the pretenses.

"You-know-who is very abusive to Severus. If you knew the things that he has done then..."

"I know everything Harry. I still stand by what I said. The person that the dark lord is most against, is Albus Dumbledore. Harry. I will not dispute the fact that the dark lord has done evil things, but I would sooner lay down my life for the dark lord than I would for the vile man that is our headmaster."

I have had issues with Dumbledore. He's obviously misguided. He's done things that are unacceptable. But as far as I know he's not as bad as Voldemort. Is he?

"What has Dumbledore done that is so bad?" I ask.

"I do not know what he did to the dark lord, and we should not speak about these things in the castle. The walls have ears." He says quietly. "I only know rumors that I have been told. I know a lot about Severus. He is my godfather after all. I know how he was treated and I know how other Slytherins have been treated. I know that, I do not trust him. I am not loyal to the dark lord, but in this war the only other option is the headmaster and I cannot be loyal to him. There is no man I fear more than Albus Dumbledore. I am loyal to Severus." He looks at me. "And that means that I am loyal to you." And I believe him. I really do. "And because I'm loyal to you and loyal to Severus, I have been wanting to ask you. Something is off about him. I don't know what, but it's obvious there is something he is hiding.."

"So you've noticed too."

"Of course, I would. That man has held me more than my own father. What's going on with him."

"I wish I knew. When I try to ask him, he brushes me off. He just will not confide in me. He will not trust me. I really just want to help him, but I don't know how."

"He's an adult and you are a child." His words sound harsh, but I know that isn't how he meant it. "If he can shoulder the brunt of anything, then he will. I truly believe that you care about him, but you simply are not dependable enough. He's too stubborn for that."

"What do you think I should do?" I ask. Because I'm out of ideas. I've asked him so many times.

"If he doesn't want you to know, then he will not tell you. That's simply how Severus is. If he does not want you to know then you will not find out... from him at lest. Just be there for him. A man like Severus will eventually crash. He can only stand for so long before he will collapse, just make sure when he collapses that you will be there for him to lean on. Essentially, you have to wait him out." He smiles at me. "But brainless Gryffindors like you are good at getting past the cold defenses of us Slytherins."

"Is that how you fell for Neville?" I ask. Partly to change the subject and partly because I am curious.

"I have loved Neville since before Hogwarts. Pure blood families interact together. It's common knowledge that my family has been in support of the dark lord and his family in support of the headmaster. But I'm sure you of all people can understand that no one can choose who their family is. It was some social event that my parents took me too. I was maybe eight. His grandmother and my parents were bickering. I being young had no interest in such things, but I was groomed to behave appropriately for such a setting. Some kids from other pureblood families that were not loyal to the dark lord were calling me evil. I'm sure they were merely reciting what their parents believed. It was actually Neville who stood up for me against the bullies. Well. I was smitten. He shared

his candy with me and told me that he didn't think I was evil. Naturally the boy who saved me from bullies, I had to grow up to bully." He laughs bitterly. "I'm sure he doesn't even remember that, but for me that was a turning point. I was on the path to true evilness and I realized that I could think for myself. My parents did not dictate my beliefs. But survival has to come first. Homosexuality is not very common in the wizarding world. At least it is not among pure-blooded wizards. The only person that I told was Severus because I knew he would still accept me." He smiles to himself. "Severus loves me."

His hands have stalled while chopping. It's not fair. Relationships are already difficult without throwing a war into the mix. And I already understand. He has to hate Neville so that he is safe. Showing affection towards someone is showing the world your weakness.

"Why did you tell me. I mean. Why did you really tell me?" I ask.

"Because I have no real friends. Because the worst thing you could do was tell someone. And if you did that, then I would have denied it. No one would believe you. I think I just wanted to tell someone. And since you are gay, or at least willing to be with a guy, I felt certain that I would not have to deal with any bigotry." Those are fair points. He's quiet and the silence goes from comfortable to not almost immediately. "Harry. The walls have ears. But. I will say one thing. I have no proof. You don't have to believe me. I am not saying this to deceive you, though you may feel that I am."

"What is it Draco?" He bites his bottom lip.

"I am loyal to those that I care about and I care about Neville. That is why I do not trust Albus Dumbledore. You know nothing about the interworking's of the high society. You know nothing about things that are common knowledge to most of us. Neville isn't raised by his parents. He is raised by his grandmother because his parents are crazy. His parents were tortured for so long that they need constant medical surveillance. The person who tortured them was my aunt Bellatrix Lestrange. Now. Keep in mind all pure-blooded families are linked in some way. It's the main way that we insure that our blood is not tarnished" He says feigning snootiness.

He looks at his open palms. "It was uncertain if the prophecy meant you or Neville. Your parents and you were put into hiding. Neville and his parents... were not." He says solemnly.

"But why. Why not them too?" I ask feeling like a small child asking a question that is obvious. Only it is not obvious to me.

"Maybe because his parents were both Hufflepuff. Maybe because they were not loyal to any one man but instead loyal to a cause. Maybe because their secret keeper gave away their whereabouts. Maybe because their secret keeper used them as fresh meat to distract the death-eaters. Don't you find it odd that you managed to survive? Surely if you managed to defeat the dark lord and other Deatheaters were around don't you think they would have attempted to avenge their lord? Even if they had to use muggle means. Protected from magic sure.. but you were a baby. It wouldn't take much to kill a baby would it?"

"I don't understand."

"Someone separated the dark lord from his Deatheaters. Whoever was saved you the chosen one at the expense of Neville's parents. I don't know who the secret keeper was. I don't have any proof. But my mother and Bellatrix were talking one day. I was little. It was after I realized I would only ever love Neville. They were talking. Not realizing that I was listening because I was studying to be the young lord that I'm required to be. She was going into detail about what she had done. My mother looked sick. And then Bellatrix said something that I will never forget."

His hand covers his mouth and he looks like he might vomit. I don't know what to do so I instruct him to sit. "Draco." I say calmly. "Are you okay?" He shakes his head and slowly breathes. "What did she say?" I don't want to know. But I feel like I need to know.

"I feel like that daft old man knew I was listening and tricked me. When he gave the location of the Longbottom's I just wanted to prove myself to our lord. But I really think that meddlesome man knew I was listening and tricked me because the other potential chosen boy wasn't there, but his parents were. I feel certain that Dumbledore knew I was listening and tricked me so that I wasn't

there for my lord." He's lying.

He's not lying.

But. Dumbledore is supposed to be the good guy. He's supposed to be someone that can be trusted.

"Draco. You shouldn't speak about such things in a place like Hogwarts." Severus closes the door behind him. "I thought that I taught you better. You never know who might be listening."

Chapter 36: Forbidden Forest

warnings. WARNINGS. This chapter deals with some sensitive topics. mentions of violent rape.
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Severus refuses to answer any questions about Dumbledore while in Hogwarts. I'm scared. Should I trust Draco. I trust Severus and he seems to trust Draco. But before this year, Draco was a more real enemy than Voldemort.

Severus and I are in the forbidden forest on the pretenses of his showing me how to harvest potion ingredients. That is only partly true. I more or less told him that we needed to talk outside of Hogwarts. This is as close to away as we can get. It feels odd being in a forbidden area with a teacher.

"You told me that you were loyal to me. Not to Dumbledore."

"Harry. Good and Evil are two biased opinions. The victors write the history books. Good and Evil are manmade constructs. Some would call me evil and some would call me good. I myself cannot be called blameless. I've killed innocents. Just because those lives do not influence yours do not make my crimes any less heinous. I've tortured those that might have had information and it did not matter if I had the wrong person. It's war. No one can afford to play nice."

"But you don't trust Dumbledore?" I ask.

"I trust him to make any sacrifice that needs to be made for the greater good. Whatever that means." I can only imagine what Severus has had to do for this war. "I just want peace. It's too the point that any way it can be achieved is fine. I've told you before that it's a war of two kings and neither is faultless. I've been raped. Physically. Mentally. Pride stripped from me. From both sides Harry." He laughs bitterly. "I was raped in this forest. My father hated me and sexually abused me because I was a freak. When I

was a student here in Hogwarts, there was a teacher. A teacher that taught me how to harvest ingredients. I was fond of him because he was kind to me. I was talented even from a young age with potions and he took my work and claimed it as his own. Nothing I could do about that. But he praised me in private so I didn't make a fuss. He granted me special privileges since I was so talented and one of those was access to this forest. I still do not know why. I was such an ugly scrawny thing, but that didn't stop him from stripping me down and reminding me exactly why I hate to be touched. I told the headmaster, but we couldn't make a spectacle about a Hogwarts teacher doing something such as sexually assaulting their student. Especially if that teacher is that student's head of house. And the dark lord rapes me because he loves me. Most of my life I have been called ugly. Most of my life I have been insulted and berated for existing. It does not make any sense why I have been sexually abused so many times. Maybe I just have that aura. To be hurt by those that I've come to feel comfortable with. Maybe each time I asked for it without realizing."

"Severus."

"Harry." He counters. "Don't look so concerned. I've told you the worse of it. My father. Head of house. The dark lord. The death eaters. I just get so frightened when I'm touched."

"I'm sorry."

"It's war. I've seen so many of my students go off to pledge their life to a cause that is dark in nature. I've seen so many students go off to die. Neither side is faultless. I just want this war to end with as few innocent lives lost as possible. We cannot always be comfortable during war."

"What has been going on with you?" I ask.

"Harry. It's war." He kneels and demonstrates how to harvest the leaves from the delicate plants and how to store them temporarily until it can be stored properly.

"Severus, I know you are hiding something from me. I'm worried." He continues to ignore me.

We continue for about an hour. I'm thankful tomorrow there are no classes. There is Quidditch practice though and I'm looking forward to that. He shows me the necessary steps to prolong the 'shelf date' of our newly harvested ingredients. And then we go to bed.

Or more accurately, we lay in bed.

Neither of us speak. After tonight, I'm hesitant to touch him. I don't want to reinforce something that is fresh on his mind. I can hear him breathing shallowly. It sounds anxious, but I'm trying to not suffocate him. I do not want to make him uncomfortable.

Normally, I make the first move. I'll straight out ask if I can touch him. Because with Severus it's best to just bluntly ask. And he will say yes or no based on that. I want to touch him now. I don't even know in what way I want to touch him. But I hold back.

Sometimes he will press against my side to sleep. But he hasn't done that. I don't know if he's self-conscious or just honestly doesn't want to be touched right now, and I'm afraid to ask.

We both know the other is awake. His voice sounds small when it breaks the quiet of the room.

"I know I'm broken. You don't have to pretend that it isn't true, and you do not have to save me. I'm doing just fine on my own. You don't have to force yourself to touch me anymore." I hear him turn to face away from me and I feel like we are doing it again. We are misunderstanding one another because we are both afraid of hurting the other and also afraid of being hurt.

"Severus. Please. Don't be like that." He stays quiet so I turn facing his back. My arm hesitantly wraps over him. "Severus, I really want to touch you, but I don't want to pressure you when you clearly don't like being touched. You even said yourself that you hate being touched." It's quiet and I'm afraid that he's closed off for the night. But then, his clear albeit whispered voice reaches my ears.

"Sometimes you hate the things that you need." I hear him gulp. I hear his breathing become shaky. "I hate being touched. Niffy knew that, but that never stopped her from petting my head. I ordered

her to stop so many times but she wouldn't. The angrier I got, the more gently she would pet me." He's holding himself and curling into a small ball. His knees are pulled up against his stomach and it makes it easier to wrap around him.

"I don't want to do something you hate." I say even though I'm holding him and he's said that he hates being touched.

"I hate not being touched too." He sounds so small. "Isn't that pathetic."

"No." I say gently against the back of his neck. "Severus, may I touch you? Please." I ask. He's shaking.

"Yea." He breathes out.

"Tell me if you don't like something." I know he will. He has before, but I like to remind him just in case.

He lets my hand uncurl him. He lets my hand stroke him through the soft material of his long sleep shirt and I'm not nearly as surprised as I should be that he's aroused. He sharply inhales when I grip him and makes a sound almost like a squeak when my hand slides under the waistband of his underwear.

He's already dripping wet and a large part of me wants to tease him and see his cheeks get red, but the other part is afraid that he might feel ashamed. Is it bad of me to want to tease him. Not mock him. I don't want to demoralize him. I just think it's so cute. And erotic. But I can't say that out loud.

"Is this okay." I say instead. Because I'm not more awkward than he is. He nods and I enjoy the smooth yet hardness of his erection. The way his precum is gathering on my hand making each stroke easier. I need to touch him more. Under the covers I force myself to stop squeezing and pumping him so that I can lower his underwear. A small noise of protest puffs from his mouth and I don't know if he doesn't want me to take off his clothes or if he doesn't want me to stop touching him.

"Don't stop." He says weakly.

"I just need to get these off first." I tell him, and he starts clawing at his clothes trying to get them off faster. My free hand starts stroking his hair and it seems to calm him down. "Just get me a second and I'll get back to touching you Severus." I hum against his shoulder. But he only becomes tense.

"Don't laugh at me." His tone is difficult to read. It isn't angry. Or fragile. He isn't pleading with me. It's almost like there's no emotion in his voice.

"I'm not." I say simply. "I don't want to make fun of you Severus. That isn't what this is about." I continue to pull down his underwear and he just lets me. "Severus, you turn me on." I feel embarrassed admitting that. "I can't help it. I'm also always afraid that I'll mess up." I want to touch him more. Not just his erection. I want to touch him *there*. I'm sure he can feel how hard I am. I lower my boxers and it feels so good to press against his cool skin.

I gently nudge his body to show that I want him to turn and face me, and I'm happy that he does. He lets me rub against him. My hand lays on his hip and his fingers are clinching at my shirt as his face presses against my chest. I want to touch him there. That might not be okay though. That might be too far.

"Severus. Can I touch you?" My voice catches in my throat.

"You already are." He says breathlessly.

"I mean. I want to touch you somewhere else." My hand very slowly slides from his hip until my hand is squeezing his bum. "I want to touch you there. If it's okay with you. If it's not then I understand."

"You'll stop if I tell you too." He sounds unsure. Hesitant. Not completely against it but afraid to agree fully. He knows I'll stop if he wants me too. I have before. But it's his way of showing me that he's nervous without outwardly saying it.

"Of course Severus." He nods.

"You can." He says shakily. "If that's what you want to do." I roll him on his stomach and slowly push up his shirt. It's dark but I can

still see the scars. Everything I do, I do slowly. My thumb softly presses against his hole and I spread his cheeks.

I try not to cry.

I can see scars. Inside him. Scars that are clearly old.

"My father really didn't like me." He says quietly. "So. He used a knife once. I nearly died. I was so scared. He was truly unbalanced and drunk off his ass at the time. Not that it makes it better, but I understand if you want to stop." He sounds resigned. Like he already knew we would get to this point. But for me. It's like I can't stop myself. Like something involuntary takes over. My lips press against his hole and before I can stop myself or question my actions, my tongue is already inside him. He jerks away from me and pushes me off the bed in his struggle to get away. The blankets are pulled completely around him defensively. "Why did you do that!" He shouts at me.

My mouth opens and closes. I know why I did it, but I don't know if it's a reason he will accept.

"I was kissing it better." I say from my spot on the ground. I know I sound like an idiot so I add, "I didn't mean to scare you. I just. I didn't know what else to do."

"It's... that place... it's dirty." He says exacerbated. He's crying and it's to the point where I don't even think he realizes it.

"It's not dirty." I challenge.

"Yes it is!" He's shaking. "I've had so many... inside... dirty. I'm dirty." He just stares at me wide eyed. I stand as slowly as I can and wrap my arms around him. Because there is nothing else I can do.

"You aren't dirty. I shouldn't have done that without asking. I'm sorry." I stroke his hair and he calms down drastically.

"I didn't want you to know." He sounds ashamed.

"But now I do know. I didn't mean to startle you. It's okay now. You are safe now." I try to console him, but I'm not sure that I can right

now.

"I don't think I'll ever be safe Harry." I know I can't convince him, so I just hold him. Because as always that's all I can do.

Chapter 37: Quidditch Practice

My team is practicing Quidditch. Everything from last night is still at the forefront of my mind. No surprise, we didn't continue last night after he calmed down. Neither of us were really in the mood. But he let me hold him and he seemed to sleep relatively fine. I slept very little. I didn't want to take the chance of him having a bad dream and me not being available.

When he woke up, I was already awake. He got up and prepared for the day very quietly. Never saying anything to me. I'm not sure if this is something I should give him space over or not. I don't think he's actually upset with me so much as upset that I know. Upset that it happened in the first place.

Everyone is flying around. Having a good time. Without a care. Not even concerned about the war. Or how fellow students are suffering. Because Hogwarts is a safe place. And come to find out, a very corrupt place. Dumbledore has always favored me and other Gryffindors. I never thought much of it. But it isn't fair. To the majority of the students it isn't fair. I nearly get hit and I shake my head trying to focus on practice.

My mind simply has other more pressing matters to think about other than rather my team is prepared or not. Maybe it's the exhaustion, but it's difficult for me to even stay on my broom. It's difficult for me to stay upright.

It's something pounding in the back of my mind. A nagging thought and I nearly crash into the ground in my attempt to land quickly. So many sets of eyes. Ron lands much more smoothly beside me.

"Harry, you look sick."

"Ron. I need to check on Severus. Please take over practice."

"Do you need help. Maybe you should go to the medical wing." I shake my head.

"No, I'll be fine. I just need to check on him." I don't feel well. Why must the castle be so far away. In my struggle to get back to the castle, I pass the greenhouses and Neville seeing me struggling comes out.

"Harry. Are you alright."

"I think Severus might need help. I don't feel well." I shake my head trying to regain my composure. "Don't worry, I'll be fine." He grabs my arm and pulls it over his shoulder.

"We should get you to the medical wing."

"No. Need to check on Severus." He doesn't let me push off of him. When did he become dependable? No, Neville was always dependable.

"I'll bring you to Poppy first, then I'll go find Professor Snape."

"No. I can't until I know he's alright." I stumble. He stops moving and I nearly collapse. I didn't realize that I was needing him to support me so much. He kneels down and pulls me on his back.

"If he's hurt, then we need to hurry up. I'll piggy back you." I don't even bother refusing. He's right. If he does need help, then my pace is slowing us down. He lifts me with ease.

I can see why Draco likes him. He really is dependable. I don't think there is a kinder person in this school. He was always there in the background. A friend, but not one that I have gotten to know as a person.

"Thank you." I say. I'm so tired. He's quickly inside the castle and making his way down to the dungeons.

"Do you know where he is?"

"His lab most likely. He was going to brew some potions for the medical wing. He is probably still there." We meet Draco frantically rushing from his office.

"Harry. He collapsed." Draco's clearly frantic. Neville brings me into

the lab and settles me on the ground next to Severus. He's ice cold but breathing. "I came to talk to him and he seemed off. In the middle of us talking, he just collapsed." Neville touches my husband's cheek.

"He looks to just be unconscious. Draco, I'll help Professor Snape to the infirmary, and you help Harry. Harry isn't quite stable on his feet, but he should be able to carry most of his weight if you help support him." I watch Neville grab Severus's long body and pull it onto his shoulders. With ease he lifts him and holds his arm and leg to keep Severus secure.

Neville leaves first while Draco assists me.

"Is it okay that you are helping me?" I say.

"I'm only helping you because fatso is helping Professor Snape." Then quieter he says. "The dark lord wants Severus safe. This would be fine if I'm discovered because it involves helping Severus." Before the sentence is even out of his mouth words of contempt start spewing. I have to try to keep from laughing at the change. "I can't believe I'm stuck helping you. I'll have to burn this uniform."

"Thank you Dra." I whisper.

By the time Draco and I are to the medical wing, Severus is already laying comfortably in a bed. Draco drops me in the bed next to Severus and then crosses his arms while snarling in disgust.

"Thank you Draco for helping Harry. I know you don't like us, but..."

"I didn't do it for you Longbottom." Draco says turning up his nose. His ears are cutely turning pink and I wish I could help him. But until this war is over, I can't.

"Still. Thank you." Neville smiles. "I always knew you weren't evil." Draco's eyes widen before he returns to the haughty look from before. Neville doesn't pay it any attention. "Harry, I have to get back to helping Madam Sprout, but I'll be back later to check on you and Professor Snape."

When he leaves Draco sighs loudly. Then refocusing he turns to Poppy. "Is he going to be okay." Draco and I ask at the same time.

"Yes. It seems to just be exhaustion. Mr. Malfoy, might I talk with Mr. Potter alone." Draco crosses his arms clearly expressing that he isn't leaving.

"It's okay Poppy. I trust Draco." I say. She sizes the boy up.

"Very well. Severus collapsed due to exhaustion. Although his weight is up from the summer- something I'm pleased about- I know he hasn't recently been eating in the great hall. I was hoping that he was eating in his room, but I am beginning to doubt that. I believe that he is stressed and neglecting to eat."

"He's been more tired lately." I say. "I've tried to figure out what is bothering him, but he just will not tell me." She nods.

"Yes, that does sound like Severus. I am concerned. Often when brewing potions, he is forced to deal with potentially harmful substances and reactions. If he cannot do the necessary things to maintain his health, then I will ask the headmaster to put him on a temporary leave."

"Can we please not tell the headmaster. I'll make sure he eats, I do not want the rest of the staff or the headmaster to know about Severus being here." She exhales.

"Harry. It is imperative that Severus take care of himself. It could potentially harm himself or students. We are lucky that this was not worse. He could have been brewing a potion or teaching a class. Who knows what might have happened then."

"Yes. I know. I will try to talk with him." She laughs lightly.

"You would have better luck talking to a brick wall. I know you are doing everything you can, but Severus has to decided that he is worth taking care of. Otherwise, nothing you do will ever be enough."

Chapter 38: I love you

He was released from the medical wing later that day, and it's been a couple days since then. Getting him to eat has been hit or miss. We both 'eat' in our room. I feel better if I actually see him eat. After we ate, I went to study with Ron and Hermione for a half hour. I think Severus needs space because he has been colder with me. Not cruel but he's been pushing me away. After studying with my friends, I return to my room and Severus is once again asleep in his chair. Curled in a tight ball. Book on the floor at his feet. He's sleeping restlessly. It doesn't take more than a touch to stir him awake.

"Severus, let's get you to bed." His eyes flutter open then back closed.

"Still to early to sleep." He says. "I'm just resting my eyes." He wasn't.

"Severus, please tell me why you have been so exhausted lately?" Maybe if he's half asleep he will tell me.

"Just teacher stuff. Nothing important." I don't believe him. I know he's lying.

"We are together in this Severus. If there is something going on, then you need to tell me. You aren't shouldering all of this war on your own."

"Honestly, it's nothing Harry. Don't concern yourself." As if to prove himself, he stands stretches and places the book on the bookcase. His face looks aged. He looks older than he actually is. He was looking healthier since he stopped spying... even Poppy said that he has put on a little bit on weight. But all of that progress seems to be regressing. And I don't know why. During the day while he teaches, he appears mostly normal, but once we return to the room, it's like nothing changed. And he will not tell me why. He's pushing me away. It's like be both know that but haven't said it out loud.

"I'm worried about you." His back is to me and he doesn't turn when I start talking. Instead, he thumbs through the bookshelf. As if he didn't hear me. "Severus. I'm worried about you." I say louder. I know he heard me before, but that doesn't matter. It doesn't matter that he heard me... he isn't listening.

"Harry, there is nothing for you to be concerned with. I am perfectly fine." And it's like I can only feel anger. I've tried being patient. I stomp over to him and physically turn him to face me.

"I never got to be a child, and now we are bonded. I don't need you to hide anything from me just because you feel like I cannot handle it. Do you know how terrified I was when you collapsed. You can't protect me from something that I'm a key part in. You will not keep me out of this." I speak louder trying to get him to understand. But it has the opposite effect on him.

He doesn't raise his voice to me. He doesn't throw a book in my general direction. He reacts very softly. The louder I talk, the more he folds into himself and I realize much to late what's happening.

He's defending himself by making himself small.

And I'm bullying him.

I'm scaring him.

My hands are still on his arms and I realize that I'm squeezing them a little too hard. I don't think I've actually hurt him, but that isn't the point. I deliberately was being aggressive. To a person that has suffered at the hands of aggressive people.

When I let go of his arms, he looks away from me.

"Severus. I would never hurt you." He doesn't say anything. "I wouldn't." I sound just like someone who is abusive. I try to talk softly. I try to speak gently. It makes sense. We've moved beyond him acting like he's a prat. We've moved past him yelling and pretending that he's angry. He's strong. I would never doubt that. And I know that if it came down to it, he would protect me with his life. I know in a duel, he is very talented, but that has nothing to do

with now.

He's frail. He's small. He's looking to me as if I am the dominate one while also trying to 'disobey' me. Deliberately going against his desire to just... exist. "Severus." I say gently.

"I can't tell you." He says dropping all of the pretenses. "I can't tell you, but it's bad. And I'm trying to fix something that wasn't suppose to happen. There are some ways to fix it that would be bad for you, and I am trying to find another method. I haven't been able to find one yet."

"Does this have anything to do with the headmaster?"

"Yes. He's... informed me of something unfortunate." He can't look at me. "Your safety is my first priority. It comes before your happiness and anything else." He looks at me. And his eyes are tired. "If you come to hate me again, then that is fine. The brief period that you have treated me fondly has been the greatest moments of my life. And I am satisfied with what I have experienced. If protecting you causes you to come to hate me, then it is well worth it." He turns back to the bookcase. "Harry, I believe it is best that we rethink our arrangement. I will not ask you to leave my room. You may continue dwelling here if you wish, but I no longer believe it is acceptable for us to remain in the same bed. Nor is it acceptable for us to touch each other intimately."

"Severus." He holds himself still. Like a statue. "Why are you saying this. I didn't mean to raise my voice. I just got frustrated. And last time, I shouldn't have done that without asking you first. I didn't mean to scare you."

"My task is to keep you safe. Having a close relationship hinders my task because there are things I must do that you would not like. But rest assured Potter. You have done nothing wrong. There is nothing you can say to me that would change my opinion of you."

"I'm not leaving." I say.

"Fine." He says. "You may take the bed. I will be perfectly comfortable in my chair." I gently lay my hand on his shoulder.

"Severus, please let's talk about this."

"Remove your hand. I did not give you permission to touch me." His tone is even. His arm is still. I hate it. It's like every part of my body is in pain. It's like the only happiness I have ever known has been taken from me. It's like I'm losing someone that I love.

I remove my hand. Because I'm no longer allowed to touch him. And I understand what it's like to be touched without permission.

Still. I don't give up.

"Severus. Please. We were getting along so well. If you don't want me to ask, then I will not ask. Whatever has to be done. Just please. Don't push me away. Please Severus."

"Mr. Potter. Please refer to me as Professor Snape." I can't breathe. I can't breathe.

"Severus. You can't just take away everything we've built. You can't treat me like I'm some stranger."

"You aren't a stranger." He says simply. "That is why you must give up on this. It was pleasant while it lasted, but it must come to an end." He turns to me and his face is hardened. "I have errands that I must run. It is after curfew, so I expect you to remain here. I will be back late. Do not wait up for me."

"Please don't go!" I can't breathe. "Severus. Please do not push me away."

"Mr. Potter, I have errands that I must do, it is late and you have classes tomorrow. You would do well going to sleep early."

"Severus please. I love you." The confession is out of my mouth and I need for him to believe me. "I love you. I really do. I do not want to go back. If you don't want me to touch you then I swear I will not. If you do not want me to ask you questions, then I will not. But please don't push me away. I.. I love you." His hand lightly touches my arm. His face gives away no emotions.

"I do not feel the same." He says gently but sternly. Then he

deliberately pushes me aside to leave the room. It feels like he has left my life.

Chapter 39: Draco's words of wisdom

Draco is pissed.

"Are you out of your mind?!" Really pissed. I tracked him down and more or less pushed him to a secluded part of the castle. Privacy spells are up. I did all of this... just to have him chew me out.

"I didn't know what else to do. I.. I panicked. I thought if I told him how I really felt, then maybe he would stop pushing me away."

"That is literally the worst thing you could do to make him stop pushing you away. It doesn't matter if it's true, you should never word vomit words of love." He mockingly gags when he says the word love. It makes him look a lot less regal. "Especially not to someone like Severus. If anything, you just made the entire situation harder. I told you, be like a shadow. That's how you win him over. If you keep doing stupid shit like panicking and saying you love him, then he will always push you away."

"He told me that he doesn't feel the same." Draco rolls his eyes.

"Well, he's obviously lying."

"I don't think he is." Draco sighs as if I were some stupid pet he has to look out for.

"Let's assess where love has gotten him, shall we? Love has gotten him abandoned, beaten, raped, deceived, manipulated, and more apprehensive than most. And what did you do in the face of all his logic to defend himself and you? You came on too strong. You pushed when you should have hung back and let him cool off."

"Well how am I suppose to know when to push or pull or chase after him or leave him alone. He doesn't exactly make it easy!" Draco nods.

"Is he worth the headache?" He asks blankly. His face gives nothing away. His tone is neutral.

"What do you mean?"

"Answer the question. Is Severus worth all the walls you will have to deal with. Knowing that he may never fully trust you. Knowing that he will likely always take on everything and never rely on you. Knowing that he has been damaged so much that the idea of a normal relationship is- if not impossible close to it. Is he worth it?" Draco crosses his arms. "Because if he isn't then you should cut your losses before you actually hurt him."

"Of course he's worth it; I'm serious when I say that I love him." I am serious.

"I believe you." Draco clasps his hand on my shoulder in a friendly manner. "All you need to do, is to not be stupid. I know that's going to be a bit difficult for you."

"I just don't know how to close the distance between us. I thought we were doing so well. Am I just suppose to ignore when he's doing self-destructive behavior?"

"Of course not. But if you blindly charge in, you will only scare him off. Love isn't a race. It can be tedious for some people. Loving Severus is going to be like pulling teeth. Or maybe fishing would make more sense to you. You have to reel him in a bit. Give him a little slack. Reel some more. Until eventually he will give up and just be with you."

"That's a really bad example."

"Well what do you expect. You are asking relationship advice from someone who's never been in a relationship! I'm doing my best to help you clean up the mess you made." Never been in a relationship.

"Not with anyone?" I ask out of curiosity.

"What part of loving Neville since I was a child don't you understand. Now I have been betrothed to three very pretty young

ladies, but I was fortunately always able to find some flaw with them to break it off."

"Don't you just want to tell him?" I ask. "I mean, I know you can't, but..."

"I have no fear of confessing to him. If I am turned away, so be it. But we are not discussing my lack of love life, we are discussing yours. I am sure there is something Severus wishes to protect you from."

"He will never tell me though."

"Maybe not." Draco bites his thumb in concentration. "But you may be able to get the information from the headmaster. I have a sneaky suspicion that he would know. Because he fancies himself a ringleader. If you already know, then there will be no point in Severus hiding whatever it is from you. Severus is much to paranoid to believe a lie, you will actually have to prove to him that you know whatever it is."

"I doubt the headmaster will tell me."

"I don't recall saying that you should ask him." He grins mischievously. Then immediately all hints of what he was implying vanish from his features. "Or. You can trust that Severus is doing what he thinks is best for you. Whatever he is hiding could very well be something above your head that he wishes to protect you from. Severus is pretty good at gauging someone's abilities. If he thinks you are not ready for this information, then maybe you aren't and should respect that."

"He's making himself sick though."

"Trust me, it bothers me just as much. But that's Severus. And since I love him too, I know this is just part of who he is." He pats my arm. "Now. I have to get back before anyone notices that I've disappeared."

Maybe Draco is right. Maybe I should just be patient.

Back in the room, Severus is sleeping restlessly in the chair and it

makes my chest ache. Gently I touch his arm and his eyes tiredly blink open. His hair is starting to take on that familiar shiny sheen. He has thick bags under his eyes from lack of sleep.

"Severus, come to bed." It's midday. He shakes his head.

"It is much to early for sleep. I am perfectly comfortable in this chair." I bite my bottom lip. I already feel guilty about this.

"Severus. I didn't sleep well last night. I'm really tired, but I'm afraid to sleep alone. I promise that I will not make a habit of asking, and I promise to give you as much space on the bed as you want, but please come and take a nap with me." I'm lying. I have no doubt that he even knows I'm lying.

It is true that I don't sleep as well alone, but I slept well enough to not need a nap in the middle of the day."

"Potter," He's quiet. The silence is so thick I feel like I can't breathe. So I try to break it with the only weak words I can say.

"I'm sorry that I'm not more trustworthy. I'm sorry that you still see me as someone you can't depend on. I'm going to try my best to prove you wrong. So please. I don't have any ulterior motives. I just want to know what you are well rested. If that means I can no longer touch you then fine. If it means taking a step back, then fine. If it means acting like I don't notice how much sick you are making yourself... I can't do that." I take a deep breath trying to calm my nerves. "I can't just pretend that I'm not watching you not eating or not getting enough sleep. I'm worried about you. And I will always be worried no matter how much you try to convince me otherwise."

"I still don't feel the same." He says with absolute clarity.

"That's fine. I can accept that." It feels like a knife through the chest. It feels like a thousand needles piercing every inch of my skin. It feels like giving up before even giving it a chance. I can't accept it. But I force my body to be calm. "I can accept that." I say again. I'm lying. And he may very well know that too, but I get what I want. He stands up and walks to the bed.

He's giving up easier than I thought he would, but maybe that's just because he's so tired. He takes his spot on his side of our bed. He pulls the covers over himself and I wrap my arms around him from behind.

"If I'm smothering you, just let me know." He doesn't say anything. It seems like he's asleep before the words even left my mouth.

I'm going to figure out what is being hidden from me. One way or another. I know Severus will not tell me. I'll have to do more distract things, but that's fine. Because right now in my arms he's sleeping. Because deep down, I think he wants to be here just as much as I want him here.

Unconsciously he falls deeper into sleep and deeper against my chest. When he wakes up, maybe I can get him to eat. When he wakes up he might push me away again. Draco's right. It's push and pull.

This war.

It is destroying everything, but I will not let it destroy my bond to this man.

Chapter 40: Taking Charge

He's stubborn. Fractured. Crass at times. Untrusting. And all around difficult.

And I love him.

I don't know if I'm 'man enough' for him. Legally, I am of age. Legally, I am an adult. That doesn't change the fact that I have no idea what I am doing.

Sometimes, I'm able to talk Severus down so to speak. I'm able to encourage him to rest a bit. Or eat a few bites. He eats so rarely now and the bit of weight that he put on, he's already started to lose again. I'm concerned. Of course I'm concerned! I love him. And since I've already told him that fact... I find it difficult to swallow down the words that try to rise up every moment I'm around him.

I know first hand what it's like to not be told that you are loved.

And I have to fight myself to not do the opposite of what Draco advised. I want to shower Severus with words of love each time I see him and now that I've already confessed to him, it's difficult not to. But I know Draco is right. It'll only scare him off. Make him more hesitant.

Sometimes I can get Severus to eat and sometimes I can get him to settle down long enough for a few hours sleep. He never sleeps through the night anymore. Dark circles are under his eyes and he looks as haggard as he was as a spy. I know for a fact he hasn't returned to spying, but something else is occupying his thoughts. Something that he will not confess to me.

I've asked Poppy to help me watch out for him. She's the only one of the staff that I actually trust. I would like to trust my head of house, and I do to a certain extent, but I also know that she's loyal to Dumbledore. I'm hesitant to completely trust anyone loyal to

Dumbledore.

Niffy and her children, Draco, Poppy, Ron, Hermione, myself, and Severus. Those are the only people that I trust completely. Except with Severus, I have to watch to make sure he doesn't put himself in needless danger.

I don't trust Severus to keep himself safe.

I don't trust him to take care of himself.

Lately, he's been acting even more off. Submissive isn't the right term, but it's something akin to that. Almost like he's hopeless. Given up.

I'm not the only one who's noticed. I think everyone has noticed. I was stopped by a first year yesterday. She was a Hufflepuff and she had a concerned look on her face. She asked me if my bondmate was alright. She said that he did not look well and she saw him needing to use a wall to support himself. She asked him if he needed help to the medical wing and he immediately straightened and forced himself to stand upright. But she said it was obvious he was forcing himself. He insisted that he was well and dismissed her.

I had a Ravenclaw boy tell me something similar. He's from the same year as me although I hadn't talk to him to much. He told me that he felt more comfortable coming to me and that Professor Snape did not know that he saw him. He was going to ask about some assignment and he saw my husband with his head in his hands and he was crying almost panicky. The Ravenclaw said that he wanted to check on Professor Snape, but in the past, he's always seemed very distant with his students and would likely not wish to be disturbed. So instead. This boy that I barely know came and found me.

It's getting worse.

We are in potions. Draco is next to me. We are both behind on our potion because both of us are too busy watching Severus stagger. He looks unsteady on his feet and I'm afraid that he will collapse at any moment. I look around to see who else has noticed and I'm not

surprised that our third member of the group Neville also seems to notice.

It isn't that I don't trust Neville. I just know that his relationship with my husband has been strained at best over the years. I also am unsure if he would be loyal to Dumbledore. My first year he tried to stop me from breaking the rules. He has a strong sense of right and wrong, and I am not sure where our predicament would fall.

Nevertheless. Neville notices. He completely stops chopping and sets down the knife.

"You have to do something." He says. "This isn't safe. He obviously isn't stable enough to be in a potion classroom."

"There's nothing I can do. He will not listen to me." I say exasperatedly. I have tried. I wouldn't say that I have given up- because I haven't, but he just will not let me help him.

"Then force him." Neville says. "You aren't a normal student to him. Both of you are bonded. Soul bonded even. I can tell." He looks between us. "I can tell that he's not the dominate partner, but I can also tell that he's trying to act like he is. If you order him- and mean it- he will listen."

"I'm not so sure that's a good idea. I don't want to make the situation worse." Draco bites his lip.

"Sometimes... being more dominate with someone who is submissive..." Draco pauses and then bites his lip nervously, "Sometimes it's exactly what is needed." He looks at me as if begging me to change the subject. Instead Neville takes over the conversation.

"I don't think you should hold back against him." That's exactly the opposite of what Draco told me to do.

"I was told that holding back might actually be the best thing to do." I say instead. Neville shakes his head.

"No. I think for someone like your husband that might be the worst thing. He's been hurt. A lot." He laughs awkwardly breaking away

from the serious tone he had. "I'm pretty good at judging what people have gone through. Call it a skill I've gotten from having parents that are not mentally sound. I'm normally right about people. For someone that's been hurt as bad as I believe he's been hurt, holding back will only prolong his turmoil. And anyone who told you that holding back is the best choice was clearly hurt as well and is hiding their fear behind a calm exterior." He smiles and turns to Draco. "What do you think Draco?"

Before he can answer two things happen simultaneously. A caldron explodes and Severus attempts to cast a shielding spell that was mostly ineffective. No one seems to be seriously harmed, but only because the explosion was relatively small. It's the sort of explosion that happens so frequently that he in the past has been able to shield it with one hand while continuing to teach the lesson.

"Class is dismissed." I say sternly. Everyone turns to me and I'm aware that I may not have the authority to cancel the remainder of class, but at this point I just don't care. "Hermione, Ron, can you make sure that everyone is uninjured. Draco, since you are headboy and Professor Snape is your head of house, I would like your help bringing him to our room. Neville, I need you to go and get Madam Pomfrey." The classroom is still as everyone waits for anyone else to oppose me. Mostly, everyone looks at their professor waiting for him to bite my head off or blatantly tell me to sit down and be quiet. "Severus, give me your arm and give Malfoy your other." Draco comes over obediently and though Severus hesitates, he does listen.

"I'll tell Madam Pomfrey to go to your rooms." Neville says rushing out. He does have much further to go than we do. Ron and Hermione are already making sure the classroom is cleaned and students are uninjured.

"Do you have any idea how humiliating that was Potter." Severus says under his breath. I don't think he's trying to be quiet. I think he's just that exhausted.

"Do you have any idea that you are bonded to me. I have had several students from all the houses come to me because they are concerned for you. Students that don't even really know you have

noticed that something is off. You are so out of it that you cannot even properly do your job and instead of relying on those that fucking love you, you push them away because you think that will keep you safe." We make it to the room and I unceremoniously drop him on the large overstuffed loveseat. He doesn't say anything when I summon an elf and then ask them to bring a bit of food for Severus.

He doesn't say anything when the food comes. He doesn't say anything as I watch him eat until I feel satisfied that he's eaten enough. He doesn't say anything when Draco hugs him then pats my arm then leaves. He doesn't say anything when Poppy comes and checks him over. Even when she gently asks him questions, he doesn't answer. He doesn't say anything when she hands me a potion that should help him sleep a bit easier. It's not quite as strong as dreamlessly, but it also doesn't have the same ill effects the stronger potion has. He doesn't say anything when I tell Poppy he will not be teaching his other two classes today. She agrees to inform Dumbledore.

He doesn't say anything as I skip the rest of my classes that day and just stay with him.

I'm getting frustrated. I'm not necessarily angry with him. I'm just sick of watching him waste away when so many want to help him.

He sits silently with his hands in his lap. He's hunched into himself and not really looking at anything. Aside from the breathing and the occasional twitch of his finger, he's almost comatose.

I sit on the floor in front of him and gently take his hands. I lay my head on his lap and although he tenses, he doesn't stop me.

"Severus. You are a frustrating man. I want to be gentle with you. I want to tell you over and over how much I love you and frankly it's terrifying. This isn't something that I decided spur of the moment during an argument. I've felt like this for a long time. You don't have to love me. But I know you care for me to some extent. We are soul bonded. This isn't exclusively your war. It's our war." Lightly his hand pulls from mine and lays on top of my head. His fingers twist into my tangled hair and it's actually really soothing. I could

almost sleep like this.

"When Princess was taken from me, I was not allowed any contact and I was not allowed to know anything about her new life. This was partly done so that she could more or less be safe. If I do not know her whereabouts then I could not inadvertently put her in danger. But it was also done as a form of control around me. I'm not blind to his ways of manipulation. Dumbledore has told me that my Princess goes to this school and that she's in your year." He's not breathing.

"Severus. It's okay. We can keep her safe too."

"He's been manipulating me for so long. I've known of course and I've played along for my own needs. Just like bonding to you. He may have thought it was his plan and he certainly did force his hand, but I knew that bonding to you is the easiest way to keep you safe. So I was willing. I didn't imagine I would live through the war anyways and I certainly didn't think you would profess... l.. profess lov...." He stops talking. "That wasn't part of the plan. And now he's told me who Princess is and I'm terrified. I knew how I was going to keep you alive. But I don't know how to keep her alive too. If he tried to use her against me I can't Harry. I can't. I don't know what he will do."

"Shh. Easy. You don't have to do this alone. Just tell me. Who is Princess?" He's shaking.

"The family that adopted her changed her name. Her name isn't Wendy anymore it's Megan Jones. She's a Hufflepuff."

Chapter 41: Shh don't tell Severus

He probably wouldn't want me to do this. Actually, I know he wouldn't. I'm not even supposed to be here. I'm not even supposed to talk to her.

"Hello Harry, you don't normally come to the potion's club." Megan smiles at me kindly. Now that I look at her with the newfound knowledge, it's much easier to see slight resemblances to her uncle. Both have dark hair and dark eyes- though her colors are much lighter than Severus's. The few times that I have spoken to her, she appeared much more reserved but not necessarily weak willed.

I don't know any other way to say this other than- I can tell she is really loved and well taken care of outside of Hogwarts.

Now that I'm here I forget what my excuse for coming was. Guess I should wing it.

"I've wanted to speak with you about the potion club for a while. How did you come to be the leader of it?" She laughs lightly at my question.

"That's what you want to talk about? Why, are you planning on usurping me just because your husband is the potion master of this school?" Her tone is clearly joking with no malice or hints of negativity. "It's really not an exciting story. No one wanted to be the potion club president except for a dork like me. I just love this stuff!" She realizing her excitement and then pulls herself back a bit. Would Severus act like this if he was nurtured as a child instead of abused. "So I asked Professor Snape because you have to have the potion master's approval of course for a potion club. It always existed but it was mostly just a goof off club. It's not much different now except we focus more on tutoring. Well. Mostly it consisted of me helping students but not that Professor Snape is doing his own tutoring there haven't been many coming to the potion club

anymore." It's quite for a moment and she holds up both of her hands. "Not that I'm saying that I'm upset with him. I'm really glad that students are getting the help they need it's just been really quiet. No one other than me seems to have any real interest in potions. They only wanted help with their assignments. But everyone seems to be doing much better so that makes me happy."

I can see why Severus loves her. I love her and I hardly know her. She really is like a princess. Pure and friendly.

"You really like potions." I say. She smiles and nods.

"I really do. My parents don't understand it really. And neither do my friends. It's really a shame it has such a bad connotation with people because of the medieval view of witches and wizards around a cauldron and it's pseudo relationship to the dark arts. Like the wolvesbane potion!" She exclaims. "It is considered dark because it is one of the most deadliest poisons that can be brewed, but it's use is anything but evil. Even the killing curse was not originally evil. It was originally painless and done by mediwitches to ease dying patients on their journey to the afterlife, but it's use became twisted." She's rambling. Just talking. Happy to talk about something she is passionate about with anyone that is interested enough to listen.

"Are your parents supportive." It feels weird asking that and it makes her pause for a long moment. She tilts her head at my arbitrary question.

"I couldn't imagine being raised by more loving parents." She's not smiling while she says this though. "My parents aren't really my parents though. They love me and I completely consider them my parents, but they are not biologically mine. It was pretty easy to figure out and not something they could really hide from me." She smiles very softly. "My mom... my adoptive mom is unable to have children because she was once a man. I hope to one day develop a potion that can help my mom have the biological children she always wanted. They have always been very honest with me and very supportive even if they do not completely understand my wants. I'm not really sure why my biological parents did not want me. I feel like..." She pauses. "This is going to sound bonkers but

from one orphan to another..." She looks at me meaningfully. "I remember large hands holding me lovingly in a pink room. I have dreams about it sometimes. Being hummed to. Being held close and I can't be sure that those are real memories or just wishful thinking. I would like to believe that I wasn't given away because I wasn't loved."

That hurts. More than I can let her know.

"Oh. And don't tell anyone that my parents are not the conventional type. I mean that my mother was once I man. I'm not in anyway ashamed of them. In fact like I said I couldn't imagine more perfect parents. But. There are people who would make comments. I consider myself to be a pretty kind person. I am not normally quick to anger, but before I came to Hogwarts I became really use to fighting. I'm a bit protective of my family, and I really don't want to kick anyone's ass for making a stupid homophobic comment." She smiles sweetly and I get a chill up my spine. Yes. This girl is definitely related to Severus.

"It's alright, I understand." She smiles much kinder.

"I had a feeling you might. I'm not necessarily trying to hide it. If anyone did find out then so be it. But my parents..." She pauses. "They were always afraid that I would get bullied simply because they are different." She shakes her head. "My parents who are loving and kind and supportive get criticized while 'normal' abusive families do not." She smiles again. "I don't know what you expected from talking to me. I don't know what your real reason is..." She pauses. "But I hope I answered whatever question you had."

She did. Without me even knowing what I wanted to gain from this conversation, I found it.

She's happy. She's loved. With that, I feel better.

"I'm going to ask a favor of you. It might sound crazy, but I would really appreciate if you made it a point to not go on the Hogsmeade trips. I'll keep your secrets, but please don't tell anyone that I asked you to stay behind. Please. Just come up with an excuse that you aren't feeling well or something. This war is going to come to a

head soon enough."

"Why me?" She asks. "We've been classmates for seven years and I can count on one hand the number of times we've talked outside of the classroom. I could understand if you were asking everyone to stay behind, but you aren't. You are only asking me. That simply doesn't add up."

Severus isn't going to like this. She's too clever. I didn't expect her to outright call me out.

"I'm afraid that you could become a target. Anyone could really, but if you because a target it could be really bad." She crosses her arms and for a moment she reminds me of Severus. She's just like my husband.

"Why could it be bad if I were to be a target. I am no different from any other student." But she is. "I know that people think Hufflepuffs are stupid, but we aren't. I can't make you tell me. But if you do not, I can't guarantee that I'll stay behind."

"I can't tell you. It isn't my place to tell you." I have to back out.

"Then it also wasn't your place to come and speak to me." She leans in close and her dark eyes look all the darker, like she is staring into my soul. "Does your husband know you are doing something naughty?" I take a step back but she follows. "I first got into potions because I know memories never truly dissipate. I thought if I could unlock my infantile memories then I could see why my parents didn't love me. I found out much more than I was likely suppose to. I found out that I was very much loved even if not by my biological parents. My uncle loved me very much. He called me Princess in fact. Since the memories were that of an infant, some things are blurry, but I've known for quite some time that Professor Snape was once my guardian. I have no idea why he gave me away. I have no idea why he suddenly decided that he didn't want me, but I knew there was a point that he did love me. I've never confronted him. He's also never treated me any different than any other student, so it's clear he doesn't think of me as his princess any longer. It's clear he wishes to pretend I never existed. So why are you here Harry?" She narrows her eyes. "And why are you crying?"

I can't stop myself. I can't stop myself.

My arms are around her. I can deeply understand the pain she is feeling and because Severus loves her, I cannot stand to see her hurting. How long has she known and how long has she thought that Severus did not want her? How long has she thought that her uncle hated her.

"He never knew you were so close. He wanted you. He still loves you. He mourns for his Princess and can't forget the fact that he was told he was unfit to raise you. He was told he wasn't good enough to be your guardian. But he loves you. In his house your room is still the way it's been since you were taken from him. The crib. The toys. It's as if you were abducted in the middle of playing. He never wanted to lose you. You are his daughter. His daughter that he was told he wasn't good enough to love. For him, you will always be someone he cherishes."

Her fingers lay on the top of my head. I should feel pathetic crying into this girl's shoulder, and maybe I would if her head wasn't in mine crying just as hard.

Chapter 42: A new Development

Severus is tense in my arms.

I told Megan for now to keep our talk a secret. Not to tell anyone. Not even Severus or her close friends. After the war if we all make it through safely then I want the two of them to talk. She said that she understood. It's for her own safety and also Severus's relative peace of mind. So now both know about the other but neither knows that the other knows.

Severus is tense in my arms.

He's curled into the fetal position and my arm is draped over him. We share a bed every night and the dark circles under his eyes have lessened even if they haven't completely vanished. It's late, but he's not asleep yet. My face presses into the back of his neck and I feel him shiver.

"Severus." I whisper to the man still awake next to me. He doesn't respond at first. In fact, it takes him so long to respond that I wonder if he even heard me.

"Yes Harry?" His words are just as quiet.

"We are both men. You don't have to be embarrassed about being aroused." He curls more into himself but he doesn't deny it. It's dark, but I can see that his pale ears are pink. I have an urge that I almost can't restrain. I want to suck on his ears. I want to take them into my mouth and nibble on the shell until the pink is a full-blown red.

I've never had a desire like that before. Instead I bite my lip to ground myself. Making Severus more nervous will only make things harder for him.

I can tell he's aroused from his body language. I can tell he's aroused from the way his shoulders are raised and his head is slightly hunched. He's trying to make himself small in the hopes that I will not notice. But it's not something he can hide from me. Just the heat of his body is enough to give it away.

Severus likes to be held. He may never admit it out loud, but his favorite way to sleep is curled into my side with his head laying either on my chest or arm. Unconsciously, his leg with lay over top my body and he molds into my side. When he faces away from me to sleep, he is either upset with me or trying to hide his arousal.

We've had no disagreements tonight. He isn't upset with me. He only refrains from touching me when his body desires more than gentle cuddling. The more he wants, the less he lets himself have. It's really a shame.

"Severus. It's okay if you are nervous. And it's okay if you are aroused. We are both men it's normal for us to get erections. It's even normal for us to get them randomly." I don't think that's the case this time, but I'm willing to give him an out. "Severus. I would never touch you without your consent. You know that. It's okay to say no." He's quiet. "But it's also okay to say yes." His ears are adorable. My fingers push his dark hair more behind his ears so that I can see them clearly. They make my mouth water.

"I wouldn't know how to ask or even what to ask for." He says. I kiss his cheek. It relaxes him enough.

"I'm your husband. And I love you. I will always want to touch you or hold you. More. Less. Whatever you want. I'm happy to take the lead Severus, but I need to know that you are consenting."

"If I change my mind though..." he doesn't finish his sentence. He's not ready. I know that and I'm not going to push.

"Severus you are allowed to change your mind at any point. We can't help what we are afraid of. I'm afraid too. But I know that I want you. And I'm not willing to let my fears influence how I treat you. I'm terrified that you'll push me away. Again. But I just can't let that influence me. You only have to trust me Severus."

"I." He doesn't say anything else. But I don't pressure him. Draco made a very valid point. Being with Severus is going to be difficult. We both have a lot of baggage. But it's worth it. I wouldn't take it any other way. Because all the good and bad. This is him. "I don't think I can tonight. I know you want me to just... but I can't. I just can't Harry." He exhales. "I know it's pathetic. I know it's obvious that I want... something I can't bring myself to say. I know it shouldn't be this difficult but Harry I just..."

"Severus." I cut him off because he seems to be spiraling. I say his name softly and he immediately calms down. "You don't have to explain anything. I get it. I understand. I'm not pressuring you. I'm happy just holding you like this. It's not pathetic. It's very understandable." I grip his hand firmly in mine. "I'm not in any rush Severus." And I'm not. Yes. I want to touch him. I want to kiss him. And I definitely want to make love. But. It doesn't have to be tonight. It doesn't have to be anytime soon. It doesn't have to ever happen. Just because I want it does not mean that it's the only thing I want.

"Thank you." He sounds so soft that I just hold him tighter.

"Try to get some sleep Severus. I love you." I say. He doesn't say anything. And he doesn't need to. I'm getting better at reading his body language because to understand Severus you can't just listen to the words. I can tell right now that each time I tell him that I love him, he gets extremely embarrassed or maybe even shy is a better word, but he also relaxes for a fraction of a second before his walls are back up. I think he likes hearing it even if it's something he's not fully prepared to hear.

Everything between Severus and I is back to our shaky norm. Sometimes he's more comfortable being touched or coddled and other times he is not. It's more or less the same as it was before. At any moment his insecurities could get the best of him and he very well might try to backpaddle, but it's mostly the same.

There is a new development though.

A terrifying one actually.

Severus- likely due to stress and exhaustion- has been falling asleep before me every night. In the past he tended to stay up later than me even if we shared a bed. When Severus goes to sleep, I get waves of *something*. I can't fully explain what that something is, but each night it gets stronger.

I know I'm going to sound like a hypocrite, but I've not told Severus because I do not want him to worry. I know if I tell him he will make it a point to lower the amount of sleep he is getting to better block the sensations I am getting. I can't let him continue doing that.

They aren't necessarily painful like the pain I would feel associated with my scar. And I'm not having any visions. But it's like... it's like a pull. It's like a string tied around my left wrist encouraging me. Once I got as far as putting on my invisibility cloak and making it to the entrance before I realized how dangerous following the feeling is.

But at the same time.

I know it leads to Voldemort and I know for better or worse it leads to the end of this war.

I have no one that I can talk to about this. I know it's stupid. I know that I'm not strong enough just yet. But I also know that Severus blocks all of these feelings during the day. I'm sure he feels the pull. I even wonder if it's intended for him. It is my left arm after all. And it only happens when he's unconscious.

Severus is much stronger-willed than I. I'm sure he would not be lured in by the pull, but I also know that Severus does not value his own life. If he thought that going back to Voldemort would keep me and now his princess safe. He would. And the stress that he's been under.

This could be my chance to end Voldemort once and for all.

And I already have a plan, I just wonder if I will be able to pull it off.

Chapter 43: Another chapter about chess

I would be lying if I said that I was not afraid.

I'm terrified.

I know there's a chance that I could die. I know there is a chance that something worse than death could happen. But I know the prophecy. I know that I have to be the one to kill him. No one else. I don't want any needless deaths. I don't want to endanger all those that I care for.

And I also know that if I do not go to him, he will eventually come to me.

No one wants to admit this war is going to happen. We are waiting and plotting and planning. But it's not that simple.

It almost feels natural to be breaking rules again. With my cloak, I sneak up to the headmaster's room.

It's a pivotal part of the plan. Before I can say the password that took me a week of sleuthing to find out, the wall opens up to let me in. It seems the old man was expecting me because there he waits with a pot of tea and a chess board neatly set up. He motions to the seat across from him.

"Harry my boy. A bit late to be wondering around." He's not surprised. "What brings you here my boy." I take a seat. Sneaking up on him clearly isn't going to happen.

"I came to steal your wand. I know it's the elder wand and I need it to defeat Voldemort." The headmaster moves his white peace. A pawn on the far left two places ahead. A cup is set beside each of us and he pours himself a cup and then me. "Sugar?" He asks. And I shake my head. "It's your turn my boy."

This entire situation is strange.

"Didn't you hear me. I said that I've come to steal your wand."

"Yes Harry. I've heard you. Now please. Take your turn." I lead with my black knight. The right one. He moves another pawn. "So, you believe you are strong enough to take on the dark lord."

"I'm not sure." I move my knight again. He moves the pawn furthest forward an additional space.

"You are willing to put the entire wizarding world in danger for a gamble. That is a bold move."

"Something has to be done." I move a pawn forward to head off one of his. This continues back and forth. Quietly we make our plays. It get to my turn and I have the option to take out one of his rooks with my knight or take out one of his pawns in order to protect one of my pawns. I take out his pawn.

"You could have taken my rook, but instead you decided to protect one of your pawns. That's a peculiar choice." He says simply.

"I guess that's the difference between us." I say. "Any piece could win the game. Protecting all that you can should be the priority." He smiles half way and takes a small sip of his tea.

"In theory that is a good plan. Unfortunately, in practice that is impossible. Some pieces have to be sacrificed. Without sacrifice nothing can be accomplished. Even this school. The founders used a portion of their magic for the sorting hat knowing that they would never get it back. Sacrifice is part of life. Attempting to protect everything, will cause you to lose everything." He exhales. "That is something I know first-hand."

"Severus isn't your pawn. Not anymore." I say. He examines me for a long moment. "You've tried to break his spirit. I don't care what your reason is. I love him. And I will not allow you to endanger him anymore. I will protect him."

"Severus made the ill decision to go to the dark side during the first war. He made that choice and then he came to me and I saved him

from Azkaban. I gave him a job and he fully agreed to become spy for me."

"You allowed him to stay in a home knowing full well that he was being abused. You allowed his head of house to abuse him. A teacher that he was suppose to trust and feel safe with abused him and not only did you do nothing to stop it, you even had him back last year teaching students again. You took his Niece away from him and told him that he was unfit even though he loved that little girl. Knowing that he has suffered sexual abuse at the hands of Voldemort you still sent him back and then knowing about my own abuse, you deceived me and made me rape him." The entire time he's silent.

"Harry, without you this war cannot be won. You are the king. If you are taken out then the war is over and no one else will be able to destroy him. You simply are not ready. I have had to made choices in this war that were not easy. There are still things you do not know and things you do not understand."

"Enough of this game." I flip the table and chess pieces go everywhere. "I need your wand. And I'm prepared to take it." He chuckles.

"Do you really think you are skilled enough to beat me in a duel?" No. I don't. I've not had the years of experience. I honestly intended to fight dirty. "Severus is protecting you. A soul bond is stronger than any other bond that can be forged between two people. He is protecting you at all times. If you went to take on Voldemort then Severus's aura would still be protecting you. I doubt even the killing curse would be enough to actually end your life. Not that I believe he would actually cast it on you. You are tied to the man he loves after all. To cast a killing curse on someone soul bonded. It is likely it could endanger Severus. Honestly. So few soul bonds have been properly done no one knows for sure the full extent that a partner is influenced."

"You counted on him not wanting to hurt the man he loves." Dumbledore smiles.

"Exactly. He briefly wanted to soul bond with Severus- not that he

could have of course since neither of them were virgins. There are ways around that though if he searched for them. Even the dark mark is just a form of bonding. I personally believe that the only reason he didn't force Severus into a type of soul bond with him is because of the Horcruxes. As you know that splits the persons soul. It is not a pleasant feeling from what I've been told. It's a constant pain. And he has done that many time amplifying the pain. I could imagine him not wishing to expose Severus to that level of torture. We are fortunate that he cares for Severus so deeply."

I've seen Severus come home bloody and in pain. If that is how he shows he loves Severus, then he's warped.

Which may actually not be far off.

"If Severus is protecting me anyways, then why can't I just go face Voldemort now?"

"Because it isn't time."

"I'm going to make it clear. I don't trust you. I don't even like you." He nods.

"Fair enough."

"I'm taking your wand and I'm going tonight." He smiles at me.

"No, you aren't. You are going to go back and wait until it is the time to strike. Not before."

"You can't stop me." He lifts his wand and without saying a single word I'm flying to the end of the room. It still stings moments later. It happened so fast I didn't even see him raise his wand.

"Harry my boy. I am fully capable of stopping you. I understand you are impatient. Your father was as well. But this war is bigger than you. It's bigger than anything you could imagine." Our talk is halted by Severus racing into the room. His wand is raised ready to fight off any evil currently lurking but it's only the two of us.

"I felt a large surge of magic hitting Harry. What happened." Dumbledore smiles oddly.

"I was merely showing the boy a demonstration." Severus looks completely pale. Ghostly pale. "I think I quite made my point."

"Harry." Severus says but keeps his eyes on Dumbledore. "You have classes tomorrow it's a bit late for a talk with the headmaster. You should go back to the room and go to sleep." He keeps his eyes on the headmaster at all times. Then Severus's tone becomes overly cordial. "Please forgive us, but it is very late." He side steps over to me and grabs my arm firmly. So firmly I'm afraid that it'll leave a bruise. He nonchalantly pushes me behind him. "Goodnight headmaster." Backwards he walks pushes me out the room. It is only once we've taken several staircases and are almost to the dungeons when he yells at me in hushed whispers. "Are you out of your mind. What were you doing with the headmaster."

"Just a friendly chess game." We make it into our room and he grabs my ear firmly.

"Don't lie to me Potter." His dark eyes are looking intently into my green ones. I would almost believe he is casting Legilimency on me. But he isn't.

"I was going to go and steal the elder wand from Dumbledore. He somehow knew I was coming and he insisted we play a game of chess. We did for a little while and then I told him he couldn't stop me from taking it. Then he blasted me."

Severus is looking at me with clinical eyes. He's meticulously taking off my robes and lifting my shirt checking for injuries. But although I'm still in a bit of pain. There are no physical injuries.

"Yes. This is definitely his work. He has a knack for..." He pauses to regather his thoughts. "Not leaving proof."

"Severus, what do you mean?"

"As you can imagine it isn't allowed for any teacher of Hogwarts to use magic against a student. Aside from during dueling lessons and even then the spells teachers are allowed and not allowed to use are very strict. It would be bad if he left any proof of injury on a student."

"You are acting as though he's done this before." He exhales.

"I've already told you Harry. Dumbledore isn't without his faults. But that is a talk for a different day in a different location. I do have spells up in my room for privacy, but it can only protect us so much. We aren't done with this conversation by any means. You will be joining Draco and I for detention tomorrow in the forbidden forest. I expect you to tell me everything at that point." He grabs my hand again and brings me into the bedroom. He gently pushes me towards the bed and waits until I get comfortable to join me. He faces me and although he's taller than me, he lays his head on my chest. "Harry. I woke up and you weren't here. I woke up feeling your pain and I can't do that again. Please. Don't scare me like that again."

"Severus."

"Promise me. I want you to promise me."

"I don't know that I can. Severus. It's war. I'm going to have to fight him at some point." He squeezes my hand.

"Harry. Please. Promise me you will not leave like that again without telling me. I know at some point you will have to fight him, but you can't put me through that again. Promise me." He sounds so tired. So fragile. He curls deeper into my chest.

"I promise that I will not leave without telling you. But I expect you to promise me the same thing Severus. I know he's been trying to call you."

"I wasn't going to go back." I don't believe him. It's like I can tell he's lying.

"Severus. I expect you to promise me as well."

"I promise Harry." I squeeze his hand.

"Good. I love you. Good night." He doesn't say anything back, but he exhales and it's like all the tension in his body just... vanishes.

Chapter 44: Detention

Draco, Severus, and I are in the forbidden forest. It's ominously quiet as always.

"You stood up to the headmaster! Are you deranged?" Draco chastises.

"I didn't expect him to blast me across the room."

"Most wouldn't expect that from him." Severus says. He kneels to gather up an ingredient. Draco hands out a vial and I store it carefully with the others. "He doesn't make it a habit. Naturally if he did that to every unruly student that came to him, there would be too many people to make a stand against him."

"Did he ever attack you?" I ask Severus, but I'm pretty sure I already know the answer.

"I was a particularly lost child. I maintained high grades, but I was often in trouble for fighting. More often than not I was defending myself, but that wasn't an excuse. When I first found out that Remus Lupin is a werewolf, I was nearly killed. Your godfather told me how to find them- I'm sure he only meant to scare me, but had your father not intervened, I likely would have died. I'm sure he only saved me in order to save Lupin, but regardless. I learned that Lupin is a werewolf and that his friends knew. I had scars- I still do. I told Dumbledore. I just assumed he didn't know. It was against the law at that time to allow such a student into Hogwarts or safety reasons. I told him. Well. The short of it is, he already knew. And I was not permitted to tell anyone. Not about Lupin being a werewolf and not about the marauders being Animagus."

He again kneels to harvest what looks like a pale pink flower.

"I told him it wasn't safe for there to be a werewolf student and that I was going to tell the ministry. I had scars as proof that there was a werewolf and it wouldn't be difficult for them to verify. He told me

that I wasn't going to do that. When I didn't back down. He did much the same to me as he did to you. I was forcibly sworn to secrecy. No doubt Black would have been expelled and that would have drawn unnecessary attention to the school. I was basically an orphan at the time no one would care that I was scared. I was still set on outing Remus- but I was basically threatened. I didn't have anywhere to go. No one that would take me in. If I couldn't live at Hogwarts than..." He stops talking.

"Severus." Draco touches his arm.

"Why did you out Remus when he was a teacher?" I ask. "Wouldn't Dumbledore be upset over that."

"I was ordered too. I don't know much about the headmaster's plans. I just carried them out. My situation wasn't any different. No one is likely to hire a deatheater- ex deatheater or otherwise. And the war is still going. And I needed to protect Lily's son and I'm just following orders along the way." He sounds really exhausted. "He never leaves any marks. But I know first hand that he's targeted more than just me and just Harry. I've had some Slytherins- granted no one important by social status. I even overheard a Hufflepuff boy years ago try to convince his friends that the headmaster attacked him. No one believed him and he was ostracized for lying about the headmaster."

Draco makes a disgusted noise.

"The old man needs to be forced to retire." He says. "I never liked him."

"He's done to much good. I don't know if he's a good person with malicious tendencies or if he's a malicious person with good tendencies. I'm not sure if it's all an act or not. I've seen him do amazing gestures. He seems to go all out for those that he favors. Hagrid is a fine groundskeeper. If Dumbledore had not hired him, then he would likely be unable to find any job. But I do not trust the headmaster enough to say for certain that he definitely did not aid in sending that gentle oaf to Azkaban himself. It would be a very strategic play. Hagrid is loyal enough to Dumbledore to cause violent tendencies if the headmaster is criticized in any way. I just

do not know."

"Severus. I have been meaning to tell you. I hope you aren't too upset with me." He turns to me and even Draco is looking at me suspiciously. "I spoke with Megan." The ingredients in Severus's hands drop. He stands from his kneeling position and slowly walks towards me with an unrecognizable look. "I wasn't going to tell her anything." Draco looks confused. Maybe this isn't something to say around him. But Severus said we can trust him. And I trust him.

"What did you do." He looks terrified.

"I was just curious. I was curious if she was loved. I needed to know." He's torn. He's going back and forth and finally he asks.

"Is she?" It's like he's pleading. "Is she loved." I smile at him.

"Yes. She's loved. Her parents are supportive. And loving. And she's very happy." He's laughing in crazed relief. Thin trails of tears are flowing from his eyes without any shame of any kind.

"Good. That's good. She's happy." He repeats it over an over. "She's happy."

"Yes. She's happy. And when I talked to her, I was able to tell her something that made her even happier." He's taking steps back.

"You didn't tell her about me. Please. I don't want her to know. I... I've." He's looking at his hands. "I'm unfit." I grab his hands.

"Severus. She already knew. I wasn't going to tell her, but I had too. And she already knew. But she thought. Severus, she thought you didn't want her. She thought you knew that she was your Princess and that you just didn't care about her anymore." He's shaking his head frantically as if to dispel those words. "She was so happy when I told her that you loved her and always would."

"I'm unfit!" He's shouting desperately.

"No. You aren't. She loves you. She was so happy to find out that you didn't give her away because you didn't want her anymore. She was so happy to find out that you have always loved her. She didn't

think you were unfit."

"What's going on." Draco is asking. Severus is still crying.

"My Princess. I... not fit. But she.." I grab him and I cradle him against my shoulder. He's been so stressed lately. He's been told for so long that he's not good enough and now being told that she's happy. And that she remembers him somewhat. And that she cares about him. It's too much. It's too much emotional turmoil for someone who strives to stay blank faced.

"Severus, may I tell him?" I ask gently. He's nodding into my shoulder. With my arm around Severus, I begin telling Draco all about Princess. And her room. Finding it. How he loved her. How he raised her. How she was taken from him. I told him everything as Severus clung to me.

"I'll kill that fucking old man." Draco's voice is dripping blood. While he says profanities and death threats, he places his hand on the middle of Severus's back and begins rubbing it soothingly. When Draco wraps his arms around Severus and the older man is trapped between us he seems to realize all at once that he's being comforted. He reacts as I expected him too and gently pushes us away from him while simultaneously assuring us that he's fine. Neither Draco or I are convinced, but we let him compose himself. "I can't believe he said you were unfit. You've watched me a lot, I know first hand how doting you can be." Severus doesn't look like he believes him. "I'm sure you were the most loving guardian to her that anyone could possibly be." He still seems like he doubts himself, but he doesn't say anything.

"I don't understand why it's so important for Dumbledore to take away any shred of happiness you have."

"It... isn't something I should discuss."

"Severus?" I ask. "Dumbledore has never... tried anything with you. Has he?" I ask.

"No." Severus says and I know he's not lying. "Dumbledore has never expressed any interest of that sort with me. I simply was not

one of the students that he favored. He favors Gryffindor's. Your father was someone he favored. As was Black. Remus. And Pettigrew. He also until recently appeared to favor you. I believe he likes those that see him as a grand hero. When you stopped being an obedient chess piece you must have lost favor with him."

"Of course we already knew that he favors his own house." Draco says, and Severus pauses.

"Well. Yes. He does. But I've been in the dark lord's arms enough times to him to be loose lipped. He told me many things. Things that don't necessarily matter in terms of war, but there was a student that Dumbledore favored that was not a Gryffindor. According to the dark lord, when he was a student, Dumbledore let him get away with literal murder. For whatever reason, Dumbledore was fond of Tom Riddle."

Chapter 45: In the bed

I once trusted Dumbledore more than anyone.

That isn't the case anymore.

It's like he's a wild card. At any point he could snap. Ask anyone and they will tell you all the good that he has done for the wizarding world. How much of that was to keep the scent off of him. How deep does the rabbit hole go. Who can we trust. I trust Hagrid. But he's loyal to Dumbledore. I trust Professor McGonagall. But she's loyal to Dumbledore.

How deep does the rabbit hole go?

Who can we really trust.

It frightens me. The man I love. If I can't protect him what will happen. Will I lose him. To what extent will I lose him. Draco is forced into a role he has never wanted any part of. Megan. Severus's Princess. Can we even keep her out of this war?

What exactly does Dumbledore want. What is his goal. For a man that is clearly devious- is ruling a school the extent of what he wants.

We have to keep our friends close. Keep them safe. Keep them informed.

I rarely speak to Ron or Hermione anymore. It isn't that we've had a falling out so much as our dynamic has changed. To them the most important person is each other. I don't fault them for that. It's natural to hold a significant other above all else.

But it certainly puts my situation in perspective. After all.

Severus is my highest priority right now. It's not easy. But he's my priority. Dark eyes. Biting wit. Cunning and paranoid.

Maybe rightfully so.

I understand enough right now to know that we need more allies. But doing this puts all of us at risk. If I try to form an alliance with someone fooled by the headmaster, then it will only muck up the situation worse. There are so many I want to rely on. I would love to reach out to my head of house. Or Hagrid. Hagrid. The first person to expose me to the magical world. I would hate to reach out to him and have him think me a traitor. He owes the headmaster so much, but how much of it was fabricated.

I just don't know, what part of the headmaster is true and which part is a façade.

Severus had a façade. A cleverly devised mask to keep everyone far enough away from the truth. He was so gifted at pretending to be someone else that I would have never found out on my own.

Severus is reading a book. That's a lie. He's looking at a book and pretending to read it. I can tell because he hasn't flipped the page in nearly fifteen minutes. I'm doing school work. That's a lie. I'm looking at my school work and pretending to do it. So he's watching me watch him, and neither of us will admit it out loud. My mouth feels unbearably dry.

"Harry, did you need help?" His pink tongue darts across his chapped lips awkwardly. I can't pull my eyes away from that tongue. I want to taste it.

"No. I don't need any help." It's just now occurred to me that I've been sharing a bed with him for a while. Sharing a room with the object of your affections isn't exactly conducive to relieving certain 'natural urges'. I wonder if he's just as pent up. Or maybe he wanks in the shower.

Don't think about that right now. I should leave that thought for maybe the next time I'm in the shower.

He's still looking at me.

We are both stressed. The war. I can feel it closing in. I feel like we

are surrounded on all sides and all I want to do is touch him. Kiss him. Make him make obscene sounds.

"I think I'm just tired." I say. "This homework isn't due just yet, so I think I'm going to go to bed a little early." I leave the books and papers where they are. When I'm almost to the room, I hear him close his book and stand.

"I'll join you." He says. With his back facing me, he changes into his sleep clothes. I try to not watch. I don't want him to think that I'm... I don't want him to think that I'm exactly what I am. A hormonal teenage boy that wants to touch him so bad that just sitting across the room from his turns me on.

We both crawl into bed facing away from each other. The lights are off. We are both aware that the other person is doing what they have to in order to not accidently touch. We are under the same blanket. Facing away from each other.

I'm not sure how long we lay awake in the dark. It's long enough for our eyes to adjust. Although without my glasses everything is a bit fuzzy. He turns first. I can feel him cling to my back. His fingers squeeze around the fabric of my shirt. I can hear him breathing. Shaking hands release my shirt and nervously reach until his arm is hung over me. That same nervous hand grips my shirt again except from the front.

"I'm sorry." He says.

"What are you apologizing for. You haven't done anything."

"I'm sorry that I lack any confidence. Please believe that I'm trying. I am so far outside of my comfort zone that I don't even know what to do. But I'm trying."

"Severus, you don't have anything to apologize for. I understand."

"I'm terrified." His small voice breaks clearly through the quiet. "I'm afraid to be touched. I'm afraid to not be touched. I don't know how to exist in a healthy relationship. I'm accustomed to the other person... taking what they want. And I'm glad you aren't like that.

But it's so against everything I'm use to that I just don't know what is expected from me." I grasp his hand and the moment I touch him, he yanks his hand away.

I roll to face him and his cheeks are red. His adorable pale ears are pink. Not right now.

"Severus."

"I'm trying." He says. I wrap my arms around him and firmly press my body against his. I'm not surprised to feel something hard pressing against my own erection.

"I'm terrified too." I say. "Severus, if you don't like something then please tell me. I never want to do something that you do not like." Slowly he nods. I kiss his neck and though he closes his eyes tightly, he doesn't stop me. Not even when I start sucking the pale tender skin. I keep sucking and biting until it's a pretty shade of pink to match his ears.

His ears.

Just a small taste should be fine. A small taste. My tongue traces the shell of his ear and it must be somewhat pleasant because his body jerks against mine and a small sweet whine leaves his mouth. He's at this point tightly clinging to me and it feels incredible to have him pressed so closely. The only thing separating us is our clothes.

Again, I lick the shell of his ear, but this time he's prepared for it and it doesn't take him by surprise. So I get a bit bolder. Grinding the cartilage softly between my teeth or even just taking it fully into my mouth. Feverously he's wrapping his long legs around me. He's pushing his leg between mine and desperately rubbing into my hip. When I roll him on top of me he just seems to fold into my embrace.

"I love you." I say. I can't stop myself, but I'm also afraid to break this spell. Afraid to bring him back to reality. "I love you." I whisper again in his ear. He shivers but says nothing. When my hands grasp his bottom overtop his clothes, he says nothing. Not even when I start squeezing and rubbing. I stay over his clothes and I keep my

pace slow. I don't want him to suddenly feel uncomfortable. I don't want him to suddenly feel like it's too much. I don't want to startle him. My fingers prod between his cheeks and rub his opening. He yelps but just holds onto me tighter. "I'm not going to do anymore than this Severus." I whisper. "And even this, if you do not want me to, then I'll stop." I press lightly on his hole not able to actually finger him because of the fabric. "Do you want me to stop?" I ask gently. "You don't have to be afraid to stop me."

"This... it's fine." He says anxiously. "This is fine." He says again. "Just. No more than this."

"Of course." I try to sound supportive and caring because it really doesn't bother me to go slow. I don't want to overpower him. "That feels really good the way you are moving against me." His cheeks turn pinker than before.

"Don't tease me." He says awkwardly.

"I'm not. I just wanted to tell you that you are making me feel good." I resume tasting his ears because that's what I really want right now. He gasps and makes other pleased noises. When I grab his hips he completely freezes.

"I'm sorry." He says slightly panicked.

"You didn't do anything wrong." I try to comfort him. He might have thought that he did something that made me uncomfortable. Or more likely he thought that I was going to push for more right after he said he wasn't ready. "I was just wondering if you could..." Instead of explaining, I just reposition him. "I think it'll feel even better if you rub here." Our erections are pressed firmly together it takes little encouragement to get Severus to continue that amazing friction. "Severus. If you don't want to, then it's okay, but it would probably feel even better if it was direct contact." If we weren't both under the covers I think he would be more embarrassed, but very slowly he lowers my underwear and then his own, but only just enough for our erections to touch. I nearly cum immediately.

"H.. Harry." He says timidly. His hips are spasming. "I don't know that I can last very long like this."

"That's fine." I say. "It feels really good. You are making me feel really good." My hands on his hips I encourage the smooth movement. I encourage him to move a bit faster. I can't help but groan over how *right* it feels.

"M..me too." He says obviously embarrassed. "You are making me feel really good too." I can't see his face because it's buried deeply in my chest, and his voice is half muffled, but the sincerity in his voice is too much.

It's too much.

And I can't help but squeeze him tightly as the coil snaps and I cum all over his still rocking body. Maybe it's a coincidence, but his orgasm followed directly after mine. Tiredly I watched him arch and spasm, and I held him close throughout all the whimpers and moans.

His body like liquid lays over top of mine. After a minute he attempted to move- clearly too exhausted.

"Stay like this." I offer gently.

"I'm too heavy to stay on top of you all night." My hand tangles in his hair.

"Stay like this please." I say again. "I like having you this close." He yawns but doesn't say anything. He also doesn't try to move. "I love you." I whisper in his ear. I think he's asleep before I even finish the sentence.

Chapter 46: Rescue the Princess

I'm not sure which of us is more awkward. Severus or me. Probably Severus. He doesn't know how to lean on anyone. He doesn't know how to express needs or wants. He's painfully shy. In fact. It's adorable.

He's pacing the room. The potion club is meeting today to discuss some potential something or other. I don't really know because I didn't come up with the excuse. But, the potion club which is basically just Megan and myself- since everyone else has more or less quit the club- are meeting this evening. And Severus the Potion's master is going to aid in our discovery of the art of mixing blah blah. It's a glorified lie so that Severus can non- suspiciously speak with his Princess.

He's excited. But he's also terrified.

He's been pacing the room all day muttering nervously.

"Severus, I've already told you that she cares about you. She's excited to speak to you as her uncle."

"She doesn't know me." He throws up his hands. "No. This isn't a good idea. I'll say something wrong. Or she will realize that I'm not... the guardian she thinks I am. I'm not fit. I'm not." I lay my hand on his arm and gently smile.

"You aren't going to be alone. I'll be there too. You were a good guardian and you loved her as much as any parent could ever love their child. I know you are scared." The moment I say scared he goes into a full on panic.

"Harry please. I change my mind."

"You can't change your mind. Severus, she will be expecting us."

"No!" He shouts. "I don't want to disappoint her." I understand. He wouldn't want her to think badly of him. He wouldn't want someone he loves so dearly to look at him as if he were a disappointment. It's scary. Of course he's terrified. When I wrap my arms around him, he at least calms down some.

"Severus, you will not disappoint her. You love her. She knows that. That's all that matters. Stop thinking about all those things that you hate about yourself." He looks away from me so I pull him tighter against me. "I love you. I know that you are nervous. That's okay. But she cares about you. She already cares about you. With the war, there is only so much that we can do without it looking suspicious, but this is something we can do. She happens to be the president of the potions club and you are the potion's master. This is something no one would question and I know you want to meet her. I know you want to ask her about her life. And her friends. Her hopes and dreams. I know you want to know all about her, and we can do that."

His eyes are closed as I cradle him against me. I can feel him shaking against me. I know he wants to meet her. I also know that Severus is prone to self-loathing when left to his thoughts. I don't want to manipulate him...

But sometimes he needs a gentle nudge.

"If you have really changed your mind, then I can go and tell her that something came up. If you want me to lie for you so you have more time, I can say that you were suddenly called to the headmasters or that some students were in an out of bounds area. I can come up with something, but she's not going to be disappointed with you... however. She will be disappointed if you do not come."

And this is really all the push he needs. Because he loves her and would not want to do anything to upset her.

"Harry, I am not adept at getting others to like me." My thumb trails under his chin and I pull him into a chaste kiss. There is no heat behind the kiss. It isn't out of desire so much as comfort. When I pull my lips from his, I smile softly.

"Severus, once you let down all of your walls and stop hiding, I don't think anyone could not love you." His ears are slightly pink and his eyes slightly wide. "When this awful war is over you can drop all of your pretenses. You can be as soft and squishy as I know you are." He opens his mouth to make some angry retort, but I cut him off with another kiss. Again, just a short one. "Severus, I know you are strong and skilled. I know that you are talented enough with a wand to fight off anyone. And I know you are incredibly fierce in protecting those you care about. But I also know that you enjoy being held and comforted. You enjoy being spoiled and I want nothing more than to help create a world where you can be relaxed and content."

I take his hand and intertwine my fingers in his. I want to protect him. I want to give him all the happiness he never got and all the happiness I never got. He deserves a man. Not some boy that he has to constantly protect.

I'm pleased when he doesn't untangle our hands. I'm pleased when he grasps it the entire way to meet with Megan. Even when other students and even staff look, neither of us pull away. Neither of us shy away from the looks. Yes everyone knows, but we do not make it a habit of being overly friendly in front of others. It's not something he likes and not something I like. But this. I want everyone to know that he really is mind.

We are almost to the green houses where the potion's club meets when Draco nearly runs into us frantically.

"I don't know how, but he took her." He says gasping for breath. Neither of us respond. Not connecting what he's said.

"W.. What." Severus finally mumbles. His hand ice cold in mine. "What did you say?"

"I don't know how he found out about her. I did everything like you've taught me. I emptied my memories into the pensive in your office. Anything that he could have used I emptied from my mind, but he somehow knew about her. She's being held in one of the rooms."

My hand is suddenly empty and his arms wrap around himself.

"Draco. Tell me you are lying."

"She isn't injured. The dark lord send a message with me." He looks at his feet. Severus looks at his godson, but Draco is looking only at me. "He told me to tell you: Boy who lived, return my lover to me. His niece is being held for safety where no one can harm her. Should you refuse to return my Severus to me, then I will begin targeting those you hold dear starting with the families of your two best friends."

Severus is shaking and I can't breathe. I only remain some level of calm because Severus is collapsed on the ground in the mist of a panic attack.

"No. no."

"Severus, we will get her back." I kneel beside him but at the slightest touch he flinches and pushes me away from him with enough force for me to fall back on the ground beside him.

"It's my fault." He says over and over. "I let my guard down."

"We will get her back." I say again. But he's not listening.

"I was too happy. Too much was going right. I should've known that something bad would happen. It's my fault."

"It isn't your fault."

"My fault. My fault. What if he hurts her. Oh Merlin." The unhinged panic will not dissipate and I already know what I have to do. Exactly what I planned earlier.

"Severus." I say shaking him. I have to do something. This bout of hysteria will not last long before he'll decide that the only option is to return to Voldemort. "Severus." I say softer. "Look at me." He looks up at me tears completely streaming down his face. "Obliviate." His eyes go clear and Draco is staring at me in complete shock.

"Harry, what..." Severus is rubbing his head.

"You took a spill and hit your head." I lie casually. He wouldn't expect me to lie to him. That's the only reason he believes me. Because he trusts me. And because he trusts that I wouldn't break that. "I need you to go lay down. I'll be along later, I just have to talk with Draco for a moment. His brows furrow but when Draco says nothing, Severus nods. I kiss him chastely and he looks mildly embarrassed about being kissed in front of Draco.

As soon as he is out of earshot though Draco whispers. "Why did you do that?"

"We both know what Severus would do. This isn't his war."

"Harry. If you do what I think you are going to do..."

"Draco. If it was Neville, would you charge in like an idiot?" He doesn't say anything at first.

"If you die, Severus will be heartbroken. You are underestimating exactly how strong..."

"I'm as ready as I'll ever be. Draco, I have to do this."

"That spell will not last on him long. Once his head clears, he's going to put everything together. Once you are under fire, he will realize that you are in danger."

"You can't change my mind." He raises his wand to me.

"I can't let you go." I smile at him and extend my wand just the same.

"Draco, do you want to take that chance? I need your help after all. If I have to obliviate you as well I will, but It would be much better if you could make sure that Ron and Hermione's parents are still at their safe houses. I wouldn't put it past him to strike. I also need a layout and information on where she is being held. The more information I have, the more likely I'll be successful. I need your help, but if I have to obliviate you, then I will."

"Potter, you are making a stupid decision." He lowers his wand. "Stupid fucking Gryffindor. I'll give you two hours. I know my godfather has been helping you with Legilimency, so look into my memories and get as much information as you can get and then I'll give you a head start. Two fucking hours understand, and then I'm telling Severus."

"Thank you, Draco."

"Your time is starting now, I suggest you hurry if you expect to go through with this idiotic plan."

Legilimency.

Chapter 47: Another plan... Sort of

I already know he's going to be furious at me. Assuming that I even survive this in order for him to be furious. Two hours. That's not nearly enough time. I know I'm not strong enough to defeat Voldemort. I know I'm not strong enough to defend my husband. Not yet. And I'm scared. Completely terrified.

I always thought that I was expendable. That there was nothing of any value about me. My aunt and uncle did well in making me believe just that.

But I don't think that way anymore.

I have value. I have those that care for me. And those that worry about me. I have a husband that has protected me even when I hated him. A husband that has sacrificed his own safety in return for mine.

And now someone he loves more than... than anything is taken.

I once had a plan. I was going to take Dumbledore's wand. I would need it for this task, but I don't have that time. In fact, I have very little time.

Two hours.

Two hours.

I know Severus truly did go and rest just as I asked him to do. I know because I feel that pull. Stemming from my left forearm. And I know because he trusts me. And I know because my new plan brought me face to face with my sleeping husband.

A strand of his shiny hair and a kiss on his lips is all the time I have. He does not so much as respond. The potion of dreamless sleep next

to the bed explains as much. Without me next to him, he must have decided that this would be a good reason to take the potion. Where as I have a potion of my own in my hand.

I wiped out his stores of Polyjuice. I will need a fair amount for this endeavor. Once I add the hair, the potion changes into a very somber blue. I remember that the potion changes color and taste depending on the person that one is changing into. The sad blue color makes me blush for a moment. This feel very intimate. Like I am tasting his essence. Tasting the sort of man he is. As If I did not already know.

I saver the taste of it and try to not think of how it brings tears to my eyes. It tastes like loneliness. Like fear. Like desperation. It takes like determination. It tastes sweet and sour at the same time. No bitterness at all. It tastes like candy. A candy that one would have in their childhood. Something nostalgic. Something where the taste brings you back to simpler times and you are overcome with both unrelenting familiarity and a deep sorrow for what once was.

It tastes how I imagine this man sleeping before me often feels.

Like an outsider just wants to be accepted but is so afraid of being refused that he just... *gives up before he's tried*.

Two hours is not enough time, but it's all the time I've been allowed.

I'm hoping that this will be a big enough distraction. That once I find Voldemort he will stop 'calling' Severus because he believes he already has him.

I know about the danger I am putting myself in. The things he has done to Severus, he may well be so overjoyed at having 'me' back that he does those actions again. I'm terrified. But I don't know what else to do. I have to save him.

I once believed I didn't have any value. I was sure that my existence was a temporary nuisance. I was sure that no one would ever love me. Love. I think I have been searching for it my entire life. The love that I was never able to receive from my parents and the love

that my aunt and uncle never had for me. I wanted it. I wanted someone to look at me as if I were... as if I were... *their everything*.

I pull away from my musing because I don't have enough time to spend it thinking. So instead, I quickly strip from my clothes that are pulling uncomfortably on his much longer body. The potion was successful. Every scar. Every blemish. Every rib. The hair hangs and tickles my neck. I've never had long hair. My uncle would often pull me by my hair and I did not wish to make it easier for him.

His pale skin makes all of the tiny imperfections stand out and I feel again like this is too intimate. I dress in his robes and relax against his scent.

I'm scared.

But I want to try to get her back for him. If nothing else.

I give him one last longing look and the exit our room. I make it almost to the exit when I'm stopped. I whirl around at 'my' name being called. The aged voice sounds jovial and caring. I have to remind myself that appearances are misleading.

"Severus, my boy." Dumbledore says easily. "I was wanting to chat with you. Might I trouble you to come to my office." He's smiling and his knowing eyes are twinkling. I'm afraid to refuse, but at the same time, I do not have sufficient time to linger in a long winded talk.

"I'm afraid headmaster that I am needed at Hagrid's. I had asked him to retrieve some ingredients for me and I am due to pick them up. Perhaps some other time." I offer in a somewhat polite but brisk manner that I often hear Severus talking in. The headmaster's eyes close as he smiles a bit wider... a bit more forced. I'm afraid at first that he might have seen through me, but I even changed my voice.

"Severus, this matter is a bit more important than meeting with Hagrid. I'm afraid that I must insist." His tone does not grant any refusal. And as I follow him to his office, all I can think about is the time I'm wasting. He offers me a seat and takes his own behind his desk. I'm trying to appear at ease in this room even though all I'm

thinking is about last time I was in this very room. I must remember to not upset him.

"What did you have to discuss with me?" I ask raising an inquisitive eyebrow. I'm trying to remember to keep my mannerisms the same as his.

"I'm afraid the time to act is now my boy." He leans back in his seat and clasps his hands together. "We are going to offer up the boy to Voldemort."

"What?" I say before I can restrain myself.

"We've been over this. The boy was unknowingly made into a Horcrux the night that Voldemort killed Lily Potter. As long as Harry is alive, no one will be able to kill Voldemort. I believe that Voldemort himself doesn't realize that Harry is a piece to keeping him alive. But he's the last piece. We offer up Harry to Voldemort and he will unknowingly kill a piece of his soul. After that, it will be easy work to finish Voldemort off."

"But. We are supposed to be protecting Harry." This time Dumbledore quirks an eyebrow at me.

"Severus my boy, you can drop the pretenses here. No one is listening in. With the annoying brat out of the way, you will no longer be bound to him or the dark lord. You will be free. That is what you've wanted right. I know he has meddled in your life and stuck his nose where it doesn't belong, but this is the quickest way to be free of Potter. This is what you wanted."

What I wanted. What *Severus* wanted.

"That was our deal. You bond with the boy until the time is right. We will allow Voldemort to capture the boy and he will believe that you will come back to him now that no one is stopping you. Harry thinks that you will protect him, but you don't and let Voldemort kill the boy." Dumbledore is smiling maliciously. "Voldemort will be overjoyed the first think he will want to do is celebrate with his lover. Then once he has dropped his guard, he will not expect you to finish him off. You kill him. I take the credit for having such a

brave spy and then you can get what you've always wanted."

"And what exactly is that?" I ask trying to say as little as possible.

"A world with no Potter and a world where you are free. You can leave the wizarding world like you've always wanted. Go where no one knows you even exist, and no one will ever have to know about your dark past of rape and destitution." He laughs. "Come on lad, don't act like you've actually developed feelings for the boy. You just have to do as we've planned since the beginning. The boy was never meant to live. And once he's gone, no one will miss him."

Chapter 48: Plan into action... sort of

Severus is not faultless. I will never lie and say that he is. That being said. I know without any doubt that he is a good man. A good man that cares about me to some extent. I wouldn't say love... no, I wouldn't say love, but he does care for me. I do not trust everyone. I consider myself fairly skeptical of even those that I do trust. I've had to be.

I once trusted Dumbledore more than anyone. He was someone safe. I thought he was someone safe. I no longer trust him. I'm not sure what Severus and he have discussed. I'm not sure how much of what Dumbledore said was true. It doesn't really matter. Because Severus is someone that I trust... completely. That isn't easy for me to admit even to myself. Trusting someone completely means putting yourself at risk of being betrayed, but when it comes to Severus... I can't help but believe in him. I'm not sure what his plan it, but whatever it is... I know that it doesn't involve me getting hurt. That being said. I don't trust that his plan doesn't involve him getting hurt. And that is where the problem rises.

Dumbledore can believe that he is still able to manipulate me and Severus if he wants to believe that, but we aren't under his thumb anymore. Right now, I'm letting him carry on however he pleases, but once this war is over and Severus is no longer in danger of his abusive crazed lover, I'm going to out Dumbledore for the man that he is. He shouldn't be allowed to run this school and push other potentially innocent students into the arms of danger

Meeting with Dumbledore took up most of my two hours. I nodded and agreed with him and generally told him what he wanted to hear. Agreeing all the while about sending the boy to his ruin. I'm not sure if he knew that it was really me or not. He certainly is talented enough. His downside would be that he's cocky. Even if he did see through my disguise, he would never believe that I would

trust Severus over him.

My husband. Sleeping. Trusting me.

I left the headmaster's office and made a beeline for the great doors. I have to make up for lost time. Not sprinting- because that would draw attention, but rather speed walking to show that 'Professor Snape' has places that he needs to be.

From there, I follow the guidance and pull of my left arm. Disguised as Severus, I take another sip of Polyjuice while walking into the forbidden forest. Walking and following the silent directions until I come to a great tree. It stands somewhat alone and my hand reaches out knowingly to grasp one of the twisty branches. High enough where even with Severus's improved height, I still have to reach on my tip toes.

It's like I can feel it. This is the official point outside of Hogwarts wards. I am officially out of the protective charms that Hogwarts provides. And the moment I realize that, I feel something grabbed in the pit of my stomach and pulled... transported.

I fight down the shiver that I feel. I fight down the panic. I fight down the desperation to run away.

A smile that is all teeth greets me. Overly friendly grins and a pare of sickly gray arms intertwined around me.

"Severus." The aged sounding voice says and I know who he is without looking at him. The embrace is cold, but noticeably affectionate and completely unabashed. "I have been so worried." He says overly polite.

"It was hard for me to get away." I say. Because I only thought this far. Why did I plan only this far.

"I have no doubt my precious snake." His thumb presses under my chin and without any resistance, dull teeth bite down into 'Severus's' neck until there are puncture wounds and blood bubbles up. "You taste off my snake, but I'm sure that is due to your tainting." Piercing eyes close in mild contentment. "I can only imagine the

torture that you underwent under that aged madman and his thoughtless puppets." I shouldn't act too brash right now. My goal is to get Megan and get out.

I can feel him pressing against my mind. It's nothing like when Severus was teaching me about Legilimency. But I remember those lessons and I've been practicing just as he's instructed. Sacrifice a memory. Sacrifice something that he would wish to see.

So I do. A memory that will not seem overly suspicious. My first night with my husband. His laying down submissively but reluctantly. Scared. Unwilling. I focus on what he would be feeling and this seems enough to sate the serpent man in front of me.

He coos softly and somewhat affectionately.

"My loyal snake." The other deatheaters are watching on. I cannot tell who is who because everyone is in one of those masks that I remember seeing so vividly. "Worry not about that boy any longer, you are back safely with me. And rest assured, I will not let you go again."

The words come out kind, but I feel the underlying threat under them. Is this the fear that Severus always feels?

He takes my hand and most of the masks look away in disinterest.

"Come my little snake. I have a gift for you." I force my body to calm. And I force myself to not show the immense fear as he pulls me along. "I have been planning for your return. Draco has loyally been watching over you. At first I was planning to beat him for his disobedience and refusal to answer the call of the mark, but he explained that he acted in accordance with my will even if he were being disobedient. Tell me. Is it true that Draco was ensuring your protection against that boy. He explained that Potter would never think to sully his own reputation by acting untoward in front of another. I also understand that you have been unwell."

He sounds all the part of a concerned lover.

I know that Severus has told me that Voldemort is in no way

faultless... something I already knew well. He did kill my parents after all. But even considering that, is it possible that Voldemort is the lesser of two evils. I know he cannot be trusted, but he does appear to somewhat care for Severus.

He takes me to a room. There laying on a clean unsullied bed, is Megan. She's in deep sleep.

From behind two long arms wrap around me. "I saved her just from you. For some time I've felt that you were hiding something from me, were you afraid." A snakelike tongue twists out and traces the shell of my ear. A hand is reaching down into my pants and I want to shake him off. I want nothing more than to scream or beg him to remove his hands, but I don't move because the next words remind me why he is so dangerous. "If I had to wait any longer for you, I would have used her as a replacement."

Again, he bites down into my neck.

"Why did you hide her from me." His fingers yank my hair and I'm afraid to show any reluctance lest he harm her. "Withholding information is the same as lying and you know how I feel about liars." She's so close, but the door is closed and I'm being ushered to another room not unlike the one she was in.

"My lord, I am sorry for my disobedience."

"Shh. Shh." A hand squeezes around the limp appendage in my pants and all of the fear comes at once. "You know I prefer you calling me master. Severus my love. I cannot have you caring for anyone more than me. You know that. So she will have to be killed."

"No! Please. I will do anything you want. Please do not hurt her." I beg. And I mean it. For Severus to lose someone like his princess. I would do anything to keep her safe for him. He laughs lowly.

"You promised the same for that once friend of yours. Lily Evens I believe. My love. You know I don't have any choice. I cannot allow anyone to occupy your heart other than me." I feel a hard appendage stabbing into my side and I know what he intends to do.

"And besides my naughty snake. You already must do anything I say." He bites down on my neck until there is blood. "So. We will make love and then you will go and kill the girl yourself. With your own hands."

Before I can beg or plead with him I know that my time is up.

My literal time that I was given by Draco and the time of my Polyjuice. Unable to take anymore potion to counteract the change, I slowly return back before the enemy. I watch as my vision changes and the look of adoration and love shifts into unamused anger and hatred.

I underestimated him.

And I overestimated my own abilities.

I thought I would be able to save her and then return to my husband. But that doesn't seem to be the case.

No one is here to save her.

And no one is here to save me.

Chapter 49: Good bad or otherwise

In a dungeon, I sit alone in this cell. He tried to kill me.

Realizing that it was my only chance, I drew my wand and cast the first spell I could. I was disarmed before I could finish casting. He tried to cast the killing curse on me. Only for it to throw me across the room. Nothing else. As if it simply bounced off of my skin. The Cruciatus curse was aimed at me next, but this one had no effect at all. I tired to get my wand, but before I even got close, two large death eaters were summoned and I was carted off to my current cell, but not before seeing him snap my wand in two.

So here I am in my cell. Mostly unharmed.

I'm not sure how long I have been here. Likely a day. No one has come for better or worse. Severus's clothes hang off of me. He expected the man he claims to love to kill his niece. To kill a little girl that he cherishes. I mucked things up.

Someone comes into the dungeon and sneers at me.

"Stupid Gryffindor." The light voice says. "Believing that you could stand up to our lord." He's laughing. The boyish face is twisted in deranged delight. Draco Malfoy. A boy that I never believed I could be friends with. "Our gracious lord doesn't want you starving to death before he can finish you off, so here." He throws the food at me with a cocky smirk. The soup pours all over me and he just laughs more. "Oops. Well. That's all you are getting, so you shouldn't have wasted it." He throws a spoon. "And don't forget your spoon." It hits me against the head and there is nothing I can do since I am bound tightly. "With you, it will be much easier to capture to capture our lord's lover. You were naughty naughty for trying to steal him away, but we've won Potter. We will get him back and he will be overjoyed to see his nieces that we've saved from your evil side."

He's really good at acting. I almost believe him. It's still a shame about the soup- but I know now isn't the time to be worried about wasted food. He clearly had his reasons. Either there was something in the soup or he needed to make a point about hating me. During our brief friendship, Draco explained the importance of hearing the message through the words. 'our gracious lord doesn't want you starving to death before he can finish you off'. Severus's protection is keeping him from being able to use magic to kill me, but he likely refuses to finish me off any other method. So for the most part I'm safe. He also mentioned Megan. For now, I'm sure she's being kept safely and well taken care of. If she were killed or even injured Severus may not be so inclined to return to him.

At least on the surface that's the issue.

Voldemort is crazed. Unstable. In my few moments with him, I saw the cracks underneath his calm façade. Why he started this war... I don't know. Why he developed an interest in Severus... I don't know. Why he's so twisted... I don't know.

I'm not sure if Voldemort or Dumbledore is the worse of the two. But I understand all over again what Severus meant back when we first became soul bonded. He said there were only two kings and neither were faultless. He said that if I were to be king, he would follow me.

I'm not sure how long I wait, but the next person to come see me is Voldemort himself.

"You clearly have talent. It's a shame that you cannot defect to my side. You don't even know the atrocities that man you trust so much has committed." His face is one of disgust.

"I don't trust Dumbledore." I say. He may believe me. He may not. It doesn't matter either way.

"That vile man doesn't have you deceived?" He eyes me suspiciously as if this were another trick.

"He once did." Voldemort nods slowly.

"Yes." The simple word seems to defuse all the malice that he once felt. "He is quite skilled and has deceived most everyone. That evil vile man." He looks green. "I will not manipulate as he does, so I will say with sincerity that once I am able I will kill you. Even if you could convince me that you were loyal to me, I would still kill you. Because you've touched what is mine without my permission. I cannot have him leaning and cherishing anyone other than me. I do not know why he is protecting you- but once I rescue him from that evil old man's clutches, I will tell him to dissolve his shields and then I will kill you."

"I understand hating Dumbledore. The things he has done to my husband have tainted my opinion of him. The things he has done to me have tainted my opinion. Even the things that he has done to you." He doesn't so much as twitch at my accusation.

"You know nothing of what he has or has not done to me." He says icily. "The only two who know are Albus Dumbledore and myself. And soon enough it will be only me."

"I don't know what he did, but I know he did something and I know it was bad."

"Potter." He says without heat. "Do you know why it was so imperative that you be born?" I don't know what he's getting at. "Think about it. Dumbledore has always favored Gryffindor's. It's his own house after all. He is meddlesome. Why would he favor a Slytherin like me? And no less a Slytherin that happens to be the heir of Slytherin. Why meddle in the relationships of two Gryffindor's? Your mother and father. Why push your parents together? I have wondered for a long time what ancestor your mother must have had. I believe it's the heir of Gryffindor."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Why. I wonder." Even he doesn't seem to know. "I am not strong Potter. Neither am I weak. I once was of much stronger strength, but that was a long time ago. When I was a child." He shakes his head.

"Once one loses their innocence there is no getting it back. Once

evil- always evil. I do not proclaim myself a saint, but at least my followers why the man they have pledged their lie too. As for your king?" He laughs.

"I know he isn't faultless, but at least he isn't on a quest of muggle and muggle born genocide!" I shout back.

"Isn't he though!" Rage shouts back. "He seems awfully pleased to send half bloods down the path of self-destruction. As for muggle-borns." He spits in distaste. "Those he only has interest in the males. It would seem women have a higher chance of channeling their magical ancestor and thus are more likely to be muggle born. A chance of a male muggle born is staggeringly low, but trust me Potter, by killing them, I am doing each of them a service."

"You are a murderer!" I insist.

"I am a savior." He says simply. "When Severus first came to me, it was him pleading for a swift death. He professed his tainted blood and pleaded with me to kill him. He asked of me to end his wretched life and so I did and made him clean. I made him reborn into my loyal and most trusted servant. No more was he a poor unwanted boy, now he was loved as he should have always been."

"You are abusive to him." I say. I've seen the scars. I've seen the sleepless night.

"None of us escape abuse." He says and subconsciously, his right hand clutches his left side. I don't think he's noticed the action.

"If you really love him, then you wouldn't hurt him." He tilts his head, his predator eyes glimmer dangerously.

"I hurt him because I love him." His thin lips twist into a pain crazed smile. "He never looks more breathtaking than when he's utterly broken. Just like the first time he came to me. He could hardly be called a man. So pathetic and desperate for a quick end. I knew that I had to keep him. Torture. Pleasure. He always keeps his sanity." He tisks disappointedly. "But that's what makes him so peculiar. While begging for death, he fights for life. There is no other like him. When he's in so much pain that he loses

consciousness, there is no sweeter pleasure as when he screams or begs for mercy. Crying real tears." He licks his lips and if I could take a step backwards, I would. "And his blood." His gray fingertips touch his thin lips. "There is no taste more pure than his blood. So very innocent and untainted even though he has had blood on his hands. Untainted even though he was raped and beaten daily. Untainted as no one that has gone through what he has could be. The man is the perfect lover to walk down the path of destruction with me." He's laughing crazed and unabashed. Thick tears flow down his cheeks and it does nothing to calm my nerves. "Untainted. I do not think there is anyone else other than him that could save me."

Chapter 50: Captive

I'm not sure how many days I'm held captive, but I know from Draco's half truths that Severus knows where I'm at and will come to rescue me soon enough. I'm not in any real danger. Voldemort comes and taunts me often. Other than him, the only death eater I see is Draco. He personally asked Voldemort if he could be the one to bring my water and food.

No one has touched me. In any sense.

I always assumed that Voldemort would be something of a sexual deviant, but to hear him talk, he only has feelings for Severus. He only has any desire for Severus. If I didn't know the truth, I would say that he really did love my soul bonded husband.

The truth is a bit more eerily.

It's no exaggeration to say that Voldemort is obsessed with Severus. And he seems overly happy to share his praise of his 'loyal pet'. It could almost be called endearing if I wasn't bound to the wall, and if I didn't know the darker undertones of their... 'romance'.

The gray man seems just as interested to know about me as I am about him. I've heard so much about this man that I am meant to kill, but I do not know much about him.

"Why do you drink his blood. You aren't a vampire, right?" I ask him. He once again has come to torment and taunt me.

"Of course, I'm not a vampire." He looks at me as if I just insulted him greatly. "Blood is rich in iron and proteins. Normally it is unsafe for a normal man to drink, but for me Potter," he looks at the scar on my forehead, "I am hardly alive at the moment. I detest the taste of blood. Many of my loyal death eaters have offered up their blood as a way of aiding in my rejuvenation. Although the taste of their blood is nauseating, I have had to, but Severus's is much different. There is something special about him. There is something

untainted about him."

I watch as he inspects his ash colored hands and it's clear he knows he's one of the tainted ones.

"Severus deserves to be happy." I say aloud and he doesn't look up from his hands.

"He deserved much more than he has been permitted to have." He looks at me angerly as if I am the cause of this dreaded war and all the grief in the world. "And he will have, as will I."

I watch him stand and leave. When he leaves the candles are blown out and I'm left in the dark.

The dark.

I always hated the dark. The little lightbulb in my cupboard was bright enough to light the cramped space, but that was only when I was permitted to have a light bulb. Sometimes my uncle would take it away from me, or worse yet... make me earn it.

I would do the things he asked me in order to be allowed that small lightbulb. That was one of the first times that I... sucked him.

Don't think about it.

That dark is not what is dangerous. The simply the idea of the unknown. Not knowing what is hiding in that darkness. If that something is friend of foe.

I'm alone in the dark until Draco comes to give me my dinner. I'm almost never unbounded. It's only to eat and then I am bounded again. He unbounds me with his wand from outside the cage. He keeps his wand pointed at me the entire time I am eating. He's right against the bars.

Very quietly, I can hear him whisper.

"Severus will come soon." He says. He says it as if he is talking to himself. Not looking at me, but I understand what he's saying. "I'm sure Severus must have a plan for why he is protecting you." I know

he's been in contact with Severus. It would be suspicious if he also disappeared from the school for several classes. I'm sure he's trying to tell me that Severus has a plan.

The half conversations we have help to calm me. But at my core, I'm frustrated that I failed again. I was supposed to be protecting him. I wanted to be a person that he could rely on and instead, like a child I'm being saved.

Draco doesn't smile at me. He doesn't try to offer any words of encouragement. Because he of all people knows what it's like to be helpless. I'm sure he would love to tell Neville exactly how he feels, but he can't. I see that now. Even if he could, Neville would become a tool to manipulate Draco.

Just as Megan is a tool to manipulate Severus. And aren't I just another tool.

It's another day, and suddenly the sullen aura that Voldemort has always had seems to light up. He is clearly excited as he comes to see me. He looks like a man who has been thoroughly satisfied... and I try to not think to hard on that.

I don't need him to tell me that Severus has come back to him or that they have already had sex.

"It was the first thing we did. I couldn't let the touch of you linger on him any longer." He insists on telling me. "He's resting. Once he wakes, I will figure out why he is still protecting you. I'm sure he has a solid reason." Before he can finish his sentence, the door to this dungeon opens and Severus enters. He sees the dark lord and bows slightly.

"I assumed you would be here and I was right." He says respectfully. I'm not sure if he really believed he would be here or not, but he says the words with such sincerity that even I believe them.

"I thought you would be resting?" The ashen man says and gently Severus shakes his head. I'm inspecting him for any injuries, but he's dressed fully. It's hard to see to what extent the injuries are. It feels like it's been so long since I've seen him. I desperately want to take

him into my arms. I desperately want to take him and escape this place. I desperately want to hide from his cold eyes.

He knows that I knocked him out. I'm sure Draco told him everything and I have to live with that. I wanted to save his Princess. I wanted to keep him safe. I wanted him to love me. I wanted to protect him.

"How could I possibly rest right now?" Severus says and tilts his head. He's almost like a different person.

"Quite right." Gray thin fingers gently grasp at the dark hair and Severus doesn't even flinch. Affectionately, Voldemort pets my husband and then clears his throat. "Now there is the matter of you releasing your shields on him." Voldemort says nonchalantly.

"I'm sorry my lord, but I cannot do that." Severus bows lowly in apology as disobeying the other much older man. Narrow eyes bare down into the politely bowed man.

"My lord, I have reason to believe that the boy was unintentionally made into a horcrux. That is why I bonded with him. I was not forced, and I understood that you would be displeased, but under my protection, one of your few remaining horcrux's would be safe. I cannot allow you to potentially kill another part of your soul." Severus speaks with complete clarity. There is an air of honesty to his words.

"You know that I do not like for you to act out without my permission."

"I did not feel that I had the necessary time, I acted in accordance to what I believed your wishes are or would be. You saw for yourself with my body that I have been largely untouched. Aside from the very first time, your horcrux did not defile me. I believed that it was a necessary sacrifice on my part. Especially considering that the boy bares a part of your soul."

Voldemort looks between the two of us.

"Did you enjoy touching my lover." Voldemort asks me icily. I look

to Severus wondering what I should say or how I should act, but he still has his head bowed. So, I respond the only way I know how in this situation and I hope it works out.

"To be completely honest, I didn't." Voldemort looks torn between being pleased and unbridled rage. "The muggle family that I was staying at was abusive. My uncle in particular, and he would often molest me." I do not want to admit this, but I'm hoping he will have some level of compassion for me. After all, my own life is so similar to Severus's. "When we consummated the bond between us, I was uncomfortable. I did not understand the full extent of what I was doing. And I could tell that he didn't want any part of it either." That's also true. I remember Severus's lesson. The easiest way to lie to tell the truth and simply leave out the worst of it. "I could tell that sex wasn't something that he was comfortable just doing, at the time I didn't know about what his father had done to him." or about what you had done to him Voldemort. "But I could tell that he didn't want this and because I've dealt with being touched when I didn't want it, I just... pulled out and left."

Voldemort is sizing me up. I can tell that he believes me, but he turns to Severus instead.

"Is that true Severus?"

"Yes my lord, he did not even ejaculate." This seems to please Voldemort.

"It would seem that I have been mostly mistaken about this boy, but Horcrux or not, I cannot allow him to keep living. He is the boy from the prophecy. Severus, my love. I order you to release your shields on him."

Chapter 51: I Love You

"Release your shields." Voldemort orders again. Severus stays bowed lowly.

"I cannot my lord." Voldemort aims his wand at me and prepares to cast his spell. I'm mentally preparing myself for the pain that never comes to me. Instead, Severus collapses to the ground wincing and holding back his pain. I felt nothing.

"Severus, I demand that you release the shields on him." Wobbly, Severus stands on his feet and stares back at the powerful dark wizard.

"I cannot my lord."

"Why do you disobey me. Have I not cared for you. Have I not loved you. Have I not protected you!" He aims his wand at me again. "I demand that you release your shields on the boy." The two men are staring at each other. Severus looks calm and detached. Severus's eyes clinch shut in pain as the spell is cast on me. "Release your shield!" the angry voice thunders.

"I cannot my lord. By protecting this boy, I am guaranteeing your victory in this war. He is a horcrux that no one would ever kill. You are immortal with this boy acting as your horcrux."

"I can make other horcruxes, Severus, I will ask you only once more. Release the shields you have placed on this boy." The wand aimed at me. There is nothing I can do.

Bound and defenseless. My wand broken. I hear Severus gasp in pain and I want to take it away from him. It's suppose to be directed at me. I'm the one he wants to kill. I'm the one he wants to torture. Severus should not be on the ground twitching in pain.

"My lord please." Severus begs from the ground. The spell ends, but Severus only moves enough to kneel in front of the dark wizard. "I

understand that you wish him dead, but he is nothing my lord. He is just a boy. As long as he is alive, no one can kill you. Please. Release him. I will stay with you my lord- never to leave. Let the boy go. He can do you no harm."

"You are fond of the boy." Voldemort says icily. "Is it because his mother was that woman?"

"No, my lord." Severus says submissively. "I care nothing for the boy or his mother. I care only for you health and your conquest. I cannot allow any harm to come to the boy, even at the cost of disobeying you."

Fingers curl into his dark hair and pull him up harshly. Severus's doesn't so much as wince. He keeps his face held expressionless.

"What spell did he cast on you?" Voldemort asks him.

"None. There were no spells cast on me my lord. I merely acted in your best interest."

"That's impossible." Open handed, Voldemort's hand connects to Severus's cheek with a lord slap. "What reason do you have for disobeying me. I have other Horcrux's that are not wild cards so much as this boy is. And both you and I know that the demented headmaster," Voldemort says the word mockingly, "is not above sacrificing even this well-loved boy for his cause. No. You have your own motives for protecting him. What are they Severus."

I can tell from the look on Severus's face that he knows the lie thus far isn't working. I've put him in a difficult position. I'm waiting just as Voldemort is to hear Severus's newest reason, but it doesn't come. Instead it's Voldemort who speaks.

"You love him." The evil man says with sudden clarity. Those words freeze the entire room. Sunken in eyes bare into Severus as if begging him to deny it. Much to everyone's surprise, he doesn't. He doesn't say anything. Voldemort's voice cuts through the ominous room and magic swirls around him dangerously. "You love him!" Severus's is tossed to the ground in disgust.

"I cannot allow you to kill him." Severus says bowing his head once more while never showing the fear he must be feeling. "I have sworn my life to you. I will never leave your side again. I only ask that you release the boy. I will give you anything you ask of me sir, but I cannot allow you to harm the boy."

"Legilimency." Voldemort's wand is aimed at Severus, but he doesn't even flinch as his mind is infiltrated and assaulted. After some time, Voldemort takes a step back and his face shows only sadness and betrayal. "Why have you done this to me." The snake like man asks. "You were different. You were so much different. Why have you betrayed me? First Albus and now you." The crazed man looks to me as if I were the only one to blame, and I know that he will never allow me to live. "You are to go to our room now." Voldemort says without looking at Severus.

My husband stands also not looking at me, and silently leaves the room.

"I do not know what you have done to deceive my lover, but I will break whatever spell you have on him."

Then I am left in the dark again. Anything I could have said would have only made the situation worse. I know that. But that doesn't make it any better.

Sometimes I feel pain. Along my spine or my side. Sometimes my head pounds as if it is overly full of pressure. But there is nothing I can do except know that Severus is in pain. I thought I could save him. I though that I would be strong enough.

Hours.

It must be hours.

When the door opens I'm ready to be tortured. I'm ready to be killed. Instead Severus is limping in holding his side in pain. His hands shake as he aims his wand at my shackles. Wordlessly, my shackles release in a muted explosion.

He's panting. His side is a crimson red.

"We have to move quickly before he wakes." Severus says. I grab his arm and pull it over my shoulder.

"Are you going to be okay."

"Just keep moving. Draco has Megan. Both are at the safe house now. Keep moving. We have to get outside of the wards."

I follow his directions as he fights off unconsciousness. His body feels so much heavier as he struggles to keep walking. My left hand presses into his side as I mostly drag him in whichever direction he instructs. We have to move slow and carefully to not be caught.

Soon he stopes moving.

"This is far enough." We are barely outside of the building.

His tired body is against me. He's breathing raggedly and I don't know how we will escape.

"I don't have the strength to apparate." His hand is clinching mine and I can tell all of his strength is being used to squeeze my hand. "Harry, take my wand. You will have more use for it than I will. I know he broke yours. I know that it's not fit for you, but you will need it. Soon you will be arriving at the safe house, you will need a wand."

"Severus, I'm not leaving you behind. We will get out of here together." He smiles at me tired and weakly. I can hear loud sounds coming from the castle behind us. They've realized that we are missing.

"Harry." The use of my name startles me. "Stay alive. As long as you are alive the hope of everyone will not die. You are the singular most important person in the whole of the wizarding world and though I once detested admitting it, it's warranted. You are kind and brave. Stay alive."

"Severus." I say. Thin chapped lips press against my cheek.

"I love you." Something is pushed into my hands, and the words are the last thing I hear before I feel the pull of a portkey. I'm still

reaching for Severus, desperately trying to grab a body that is no longer there.

As a room materializes around me, I realize I'm not alone. I see Draco. And Megan. Neville. Ron. Hermione. The is the safe house. I already know. I see Niffy and her children. Little Wendy is the first to come up and embrace me. She's crying, and I wonder if it's because she knows Severus isn't coming or if it's because I'm crying.

Niffy wobbles to me and places her hand on my shoulder.

"A portkey strong enough to bring both of you here could have been easily detected. He knew that he could only save you."

I doomed him. I swore that I would never let him suffer through that mad man again, but it was me who doomed him.

I open my hand to see an innocent looking cork. Something no one would question a potion master having.

"He will be okay." Draco says. It's clear he feels just as bad leaving his godfather behind. "The dark lord wouldn't kill him. I can't say that he will be comfortable, but he will still be there to be rescued when the time comes.

The feel of his lips against my cheek still burns like an aching slap.

He said he loves me.

He said he loves me, but it's my fault that he's suffering.

Chapter 52: Hum

I can hear the wand in my hand humming. It's warm and there is something familiar about it. This is Severus's wand. Everyone loyal to Severus and myself is at the safe house. Draco and Megan. Neville. Ron and Hermione. Niffy and her children. Poppy as well. Though she explained that she could not freely stay here for extended periods of time, after all she needs to be where the students are in case any of them are injured. Hermione's muggle parents are also here along with Ron's family.

It's a small army, but a loyal one.

Draco is angry, but not surprised that Severus stayed behind.

"I knew that idiot would do this." Draco says. "I was able to get Megan here safely and as far as the dark lord knows, I had already left to go back to Hogwarts so that I wouldn't be missed. He still thinks I'm loyal and Severus has been teaching me how to shield my mind for a long time so I doubt the dark lord will find out." Neville seems somewhat surprised to be here. I'm also surprised to see him here.

At my confusion Draco continues.

"I followed Severus's plan. First get Megan to the safe house and summon Niffy. Afterwards, I was to go to Hogwarts and quickly get everyone that is loyal to you above anyone else." Draco finishes. He looks at me with eyes that are begging me to not read to much into Neville being here. I know why Draco chose Neville as one of the students to keep safe.

The wand is again humming in my hand. Everyone is chattering animatedly trying to come up with plans and compile the information that they have. All I know is that Severus was left behind. Wandless.

It's important that the dark lord does not know our full numbers,

and it is equally important that Dumbledore doesn't know either. The only ones that are to permanently remain in the safe house are those that are in the most danger. Ron, Hermione, and Hermione's parents. The elves. Neville. And myself.

Draco is going to continue acting as a spy and student of Hogwarts to not raise suspicion. Poppy will take care of the students as per normal. Fred and George will continue to run their business while staying at the safe house at night. Everyone is finding what role they need to play, and I'm here wallowing in self doubt as I hold my husband's wand. The wand that is still humming.

My own wand never acted as this one is.

I feel closer to him while holding his wand.

Wendy is smiling at me softly and I just want to hold her. Niffy takes my hand and leads me to what will be my room. The safe house is mostly bland looking. The walls are half painted and the furniture is mismatched. This was clearly done without any outside help. There are no windows and I predict that the structure is mostly underground.

No one tries to talk to me or cheer me up. It's like they know It will not work. No one has a plan. No one has a plan and my husband is captured. Niffy and Wendy follow me into a room with a large double bed. There is a bookcase with what looks to be journals.

"This will be your room." Niffy says with a forced smile. I'm surprised she isn't outraged. It's my fault he was captured. "This was Sevy's room when he was about your age."

"I thought that he lived at..."

"Well yes and no." Niffy says cutting me off. "Sevy ran away many times from his home, and when he was seventeen, he found this place. Quite on accident. I think he was trying to splice himself, but he managed to apparate here. It was abandoned and it's basically in the middle of nowhere. This became something of a safe space. He began living at Spinners End because he wanted this safe space to remain a secret. I believe that's why you were kept at Spinner End

and not here, Sevy would not want Dumbledore to know about this place." She smiles halfheartedly. "I think it was his temper tantrum place as well." She motions to various holes in the wall and scorch marks.

I'm reminded of the wand in my hand and Niffy notices me staring at it.

"Fire at the wall." She says clearly.

"Why?" I ask her.

"You are using Sevy's wand. You will need it to get him back, it's probably a good idea to practice with it." It feels odd raising a wand that isn't mine, but I do. I aim next to an already scorched part, but when I wave the wand, sparks do not fly. Instead something much different happens.

Surrounding me is a powerful shielding spell that I did not cast. The wand hums louder and Niffy nods as if her suspicions were confirmed.

"I didn't cast a shielding spell." I say, but she already knows.

"How much do you know about wands?" Honestly not a whole lot.

"I know a little."

"What do you notice about Sevy's wand?" I look again at the slim piece of wood.

"It's somewhat flexible and about standard size." Niffy smiles and holds out her hand for the wand and although I trust her completely, I'm afraid to let go of it. Wendy touches my arm and that's enough for me to relinquish it.

"There is four criteria concerning wands. The type of wood, length, flexibility, and core. Sevey's wand is a flexible ten inch wand made of yew wood and has a phoenix feather core." She rolls the wand in her hand for a moment and then hands it back to me. "I believe Sevey said that your original wand also had a phoenix feather core. It's the rarest core of the three. What is interesting is that wands

with that particular core show the most initiative in acting on their own. And the wood type. Yew wood. A Yew wand often belongs to a protector. Someone who has someone or something they wish to keep safe. They are fiercely protective of their owners to the point where if they are buried with their owner, then often a Yew tree will grow to protect the grave."

"Why are you telling me this?" I ask her.

"Severus once told me that his wand only has one use and that is to protect you. I thought that the wand itself might feel just as strongly. It's true you will have to be able to use that wand in order to save Severus, but I also was curious if you could get it to obey you. It seems to only want your safety. Just like it's owner." The wand hums warmly in my grasp. The hum sounds affectionate. "Did you know that You know who's original wand was very similar to this one? It was also Yew with phoenix feather. I wonder if that was another reason why he is so fond of Severus. It's something else that they share." Niffy smiles kindly at me. I know she's worried about Severus. Everyone is. "I will give you time to calm yourself. I know you are terribly worried. Please try to find a way to wield that wand quickly. I... do not want Severus to be in that place longer than necessary."

When they both leave, I feel alone and empty. The wand hums louder. Is that why Severus gave me his wand. The real reason he gave it to me. As another way to protect me. He gave me a wand I cannot fight with. A wand that can only protect me.

I wave it again trying to produce anything that could be offensive. I try a few hexes. The more dangerous the spell, the stronger the shield around me is. I can feel it protecting me. I've seen Severus use this wand for many things. Spells. Potions. He wields it with ease. It makes sense that he does, he's had it for a long time. This wand that protects me without a thought. It could have put up shields around Severus to keep him safe, but that would have left me open... and it couldn't do that. Why can't he just worry about himself.

Why am I so unable to help him.

He's had to give up so much for me. He's had to sacrifice so much for me.

Why can I not just save him and let him be *happy*.

The last of the shielding spell falls around me and it actually feels colder without it. The wand reminds me of it's presence by humming and I banish it into my pocket. I can't look at it right now.

Is his entire existence just to protect me?

I sit on the bed and force back any tears. I will not cry. I will not leave Severus to that torture and then cry about it. I need to think of a plan.

My entire body aches and hurts. I've not slept in a long time, but I can't right now.

The humming increases.

I need to think of a plan to save him.

The humming slows to a constant lull and my body feels heavy.

I cannot sleep right now. Not when he could be getting beaten.

Humm.

Not when he could be afraid.

Humm hum.

Not when he could be getting raped.

Hum humm.

Not when it's my fault.

The humming is almost like a lullaby. The aches and stiffness from being locked up for so long were largely forgotten about. It wasn't important and it still isn't. I can't go to sleep right now.

But the wand doesn't listen to me, and it continues to hum long

after my eyes have closed.

Chapter 53: A bit of change

I'm scared. I can feel fingers touching me in places I do not want to be touched. I'm scared. I feel dirty and I hurt all over. Teeth biting into me and being split greedily. I don't want this. My face is damp with tears, and I know that no amount of begging will end the incessant touching. I remind myself to clear my mind. That is all I can do right now. Do not think about the teeth or the fingers. Do not think about the acute ache in my hips. I've been through this before. I can do it again. Do not think about it. I am not here. I am not here.

I'm not here.

I'm not here.

I'm not here.

Tears stain my cheeks, I'm so worried about him, but at least I know he is still alive. His wand hums in my hand as if greeting me. Since there are not any windows, it is difficult to know what time it is, but I'm certain that it's long before the sun would be rising. When I attempt to cast a tempus charm, the wand actually allows me. It's 3:32 a.m. That explains why everything is so quiet.

I can't go back to sleep. Not after that, and the wand luckily seems to understand and doesn't try to lull me back asleep.

The room I'm in is depressing. There is a thin layer of dust on most things. The bed is the only actual clean thing. I pace the room trying to get my bearings. The bed, and small bookcase are the only furniture, aside from that, the room is empty.

I pick up one of the journals and thumb through it. I recognize the writing as the half blood prince's. I was obsessed with that textbook. I read it over and over. When I discovered that it was Severus, I convinced myself that I never felt certain things for the prince. I convinced myself that my... inclinations towards the writer of that potion text book meant nothing. Severus tried to kill Dumbledore

and failed. When I chased him out of the castle, he was my enemy. I hated him.

Reading the excited scrawl reminds me of how I would hide under my sheets and flip through the pages hungrily reading each word.

This is another textbook that he has altered and made into his own. I pick up another book, this one leather bound. This one seems like an actual journal detailing his innermost thoughts, only the words seem charmed. When I wave his wand over the pages with clusters of letters jumbled randomly, the words seem to arrange themselves into actual sentences. I'm sure only his wand could do this.

Opening to a random page, his penmanship seems much more careful. He clearly thought about each word that he put down.

I do not know if there is something wrong with me or not. I will admit to being peculiar- even among magic folk, but I question my sanity. I find it difficult to admit out loud, but my interests lean fully towards men. I do not know if my reason behind this is due to the sexual abuse I have experienced at my father's hands, or if I lean that way fully because of my own healthy reasons. I have brewed a potion hoping that it may cure me of my sickness, but if I am not sick then naturally there is nothing to cure. I feel like there is something wrong with me.

He sounds terrified and confused. I know that Severus always tries to be brave and strong. He doesn't like to let the chinks in his armor show. I keep reading.

Lily is in love. I am of course happy for her if not somewhat jealous. There is no place for me in her life, and I know not how to remedy that. The potion didn't work. I still find my eyes drifting to the wrong sex. I can accept this part of myself. I can accept that I desire to be embraced.

The wand hums lowly. Maybe I shouldn't be reading this. Just because I can doesn't mean that I should. It isn't mine, and he didn't give me permission to read it. This wouldn't be the first time that I've invaded areas of his life.

I hold my palm open facing up and the wand simply lays there. I feel like an idiot, but I have to reason with it.

"You only care to protect me. I'm sure you care about Severus as well. I'm positive that you do but because Severus puts me first, so do you. Because that's what your owner wishes." It hums in confirmation. "Well, I need you to stop that. If Severus is too thick headed to put his safety first, then I'll have to do the same that he does. I need to save him. To do that, I need a wand that I can use for offense as well as defense. Initially I thought that I would need the elder wand that Dumbledore has." The mention of Dumbledore has the wand heating agitatedly. "But I don't need his wand. I just need a wand that is loyal to me and loyal to Severus."

I never thought of wands as something alive, but they are. Each wand has a personality that may or may not match well with a witch or wizard. How strange that Severus's wand that chose him would choose to protect me. My own wand never showed as much determination, or maybe I'm just not as skilled.

"I love him." It feels strange confessing to a wand. "I love him, and I believe he loves me. If I cannot save him... if I cannot keep him safe and rescue him from the abuse that he's suffering then I do not deserve to be the chosen one. I will not deserve to find any happiness if I cannot save him. If I am unable to save him and he dies, then I will do everything in my power to end this war, and then I will kill myself."

The wand surrounds me in a shielding spell. A shimmering blue and purple spreads around me protectively.

"I've already decided. I cannot live without him. I can live with him finding happiness with someone other than me, and I know the bond we share may make that difficult. Still. If I need to end the bond- even at the expense of my life I will. He's done enough for me. I know you aren't my wand, but I need your help. I need to save him. Before I tried to do it completely on my own, but I was wrong. I need the help of others to save him and to save the wizarding world. Severus didn't charge in on his own. He has the experience and knowledge that I just don't have yet."

I need to prepare.

"Niffy" I say the name lightly, but she still immediately pops into

the room beside me. I don't even attempt to appear calm. "Niffy, I need Severus." She nods already understanding. "I have few people I trust and I know many of the people here are here for me and not him. That isn't enough. I'm inexperienced and honestly terrified. Can you tell me where to start?"

She collapses on the ground beside me. Her small hand reaches out and squeezes my shoulder.

"My children. Brux and Zend. Brux can possibly look into the future and give you an upper hand. Zend can teach you healing spells. And me." She snaps her fingers. "I can teach you wandless magic. All of that will not be enough alone, and granted you will not have enough time to learn it at length." She smiles. "But any edge will help."

"What else do I need to do." She pats my arm.

"Trust in those that are loyal to their king. You, Harry are the king to many. I'm sure there are more loyal. Perhaps, it is time to rally the troops."

"What do you mean?"

"Use that Gryffindor bravery of yours. Maybe it's time to out a snake for a snake. Or perhaps it's still time to hide. Your words alone can reshape this entire wizarding world. There are those more loyal to you than you know." She stands up shakily. "And some of them may not even be human." She smiles again. "I thought you could do with a bit of cheering up, so I've rallied one more for our side."

Before I can ask her what she means a set of arms squeeze around me.

"Mister Harry Potter!"

"Dobby!"

"Dobby is here to fight for Harry Potter." He nods enthusiastically. Niffy smiles lightly. As if remembering that Niffy is around Dobby calms down a bit and smiles at her. "Thank you Niffy for bringing Dobby to help Mister Harry Potter." He turns back to me. "I'm sure

other elves that aren't free elves would have left Hogwarts if they could. You are well loved."

"Maybe it is time for a bit of change." I say and the wand hums agreeing.

Chapter 54: The third king

It feels painfully familiar and yet also abnormally dissimilar. There was a time not to long ago that Severus sat beside me and we pressed our shoulder together to show the world that we were in fact together. To prove his innocence. It wasn't very long ago. Yet here I am alone. Alone. And it's so achingly familiar that I had almost forgotten who I was before Severus.

Rita was very excited to meet with me for an interview. It had to be under very specific terms that my house elf Niffy set up. No others could be present aside from her, me and Niffy, and not one aside from the three of us (and those back at the safe house but she didn't know that) knew about this interview.

Severus said at the last interview that we will both maintain our secrets, or we will both confess. Those were his words. I am not looking forward to this interview, but I feel all the secrets... all the ones that I can confess at least need to come to light. I feel it's the only way, and I can only hope that Severus will forgive me. I'll do my best to omit the worst of it while still retaining honesty.

"I want your word that everything I say is written just as I say it. I want your word that you will not leave anything out. And I want your word that this will be on the front page for everyone to see. If you cannot agree to those terms, then I will find someone else." She wags her finger and the quill springs to life.

"I stake it on my magic." She says solemnly. She knows nothing of what I'm about to tell her. This will be an uproar. This will be a tipping point. Once friends could become enemies and enemies, friends.

"Then I suggest we get started. There is a lot to cover."

I started with my upbringing making sure to restrain my pride. These are things I never wanted another soul to know.

"I don't care to go into graphic details, but my muggle family was very much abusive. I spent the first eleven years of my life living in a cupboard under the stairs. Sometimes I would be locked in there for days with no food or water. When I was taken out, it was only to clean, cook, or satisfy for uncle's unsavory desires. Sometimes striking me was enough and other times he would defile my mouth. It became a habit. If I did a good job then sometimes he would let me eat the table scraps that were to be thrown away."

Her mouth is open agape at the start to our interview. The quill even pauses as if it's owners stunned expression were affecting it. She looks as though she wants to say something but before she can I continue.

"I was the virgin when Severus and I consummated the soul bond. Severus however was not." I take a deep breath and hold it. How is it harder to talk about his past than my own? "Severus was also abused as a child. His mother abandoned him at a young age and his father emotionally and physically abused him. At some point the abuse also turned sexual. I forget how old Severus says he was when his father raped him for the first time, but it was before he became a student at Hogwarts."

The quill is shocked into action and begins hastily scrawling out all that I've said. Word for word. Again, she looks tempted to ask a question, but I hold up my hand to stop her. She can wait until after I've finished telling her everything I plan to tell.

"Both Severus and I have told Headmaster Albus Dumbledore about the abuse that we experienced and very little was done. Severus was eventually taken into Hogwarts, but do not think for a moment that it was because of kindness on Dumbledore's part, but I will get back to that in a bit. I was told to remain with my family because my aunt- my mother's sister- is able to protect me through a bond because she and my mother were related. Because that was home. I broke that bond when I refused to accept that as a home. That is why my muggle relative's home was raided by death eaters, and that is where Severus saved me."

It was somewhat known that Severus was a death eater. Some still believed he was while other's believed he was innocent. I basically

confirmed that my husband bares the dark mark. But I'm going to confess more than that.

"Yes. Severus was in fact a death eater. I can say that I do not blame him. No doubt Voldemort is evil." At the mention of the name the quill fizzles for a moment as if refusing to write the name. "I said word for word." And the quill reluctantly continues. "As a student Severus was gravely indebted to Dumbledore who I believe was cruel to Severus. It isn't a secret that Dumbledore favors Gryffindor's, even if they are the ones in the wrong. My father James Potter, godfather Sirius Black, and their two friends Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew made it a sport to harass and humiliate Severus. Sirius even went so far as to send Severus to a werewolf on the night of a full moon." I leave out Remus's name intentionally. "None of them got so much as a slap on the wrist even though Severus could have died. Like him or hate him, he was still a student and the headmaster couldn't be bothered."

"Harry that's all very upsetting to hear, but that's still no excuse to became a..."

"And then he found a group that was initially kind to him. And he was deceived. As an unwanted and abused child, does it not make sense that he would desperately cling to any hand that treated him gently. By the time he realized it was already to late. I can say with certainty that I would have done the same. Ron Weasley is my best friend and honestly my first because he was the first person to stretch out their hand to me. And I took it. I was lucky that it was someone like Ron. I clung to the first person who showed me any kindness because I was starved for it."

Her words die down.

"Severus tormented me. And I don't blame him. He was tasked with protecting me. Some because his best friend was once my mom and some because Dumbledore has control over him. At Dumbledore's order, Severus was instructed to continue as a spy and in order to pull that off, it had to appear as though he hated me. All the while, he was going to death eater meetings. You asked last time what happens at those meetings. I can't say for sure what happens for others, but for Severus... Voldemort violently rapes him. And

Dumbledore knowingly sent him to that torture time after time. I think that would make anyone a bit grumpy."

My throat feels dry and before I can complain, Niffy hands me a cup and encouragingly pats my arm.

"Then the night of the raid and the night that Severus and I consummated our bond. Make no mistake. I raped Severus that night. He may have agreed, but it was more or less out of duty. Yes, he does want me safe. But also yes, he did not want this bond. Without really understanding the bond, Dumbledore sent a boy who has dealt with his uncle molesting him to rape a man that has been defiled so many times that he is terrified of sex. Necessity or not. Understanding what I was doing or not. I raped him."

I know I'm crying at this. It wasn't intentional, but right now I can't help it. I hurt him. I was a source of fear.

"And I believe Dumbledore had convinced Severus that once the war was over that Severus would break the bond on his end and likely die. Severus is harsh and says many cruel things, but he is a good man, and he has suffered so much more than he ever deserved. Any glimmer of happiness was taken from him. He adopted his niece and Dumbledore took her away even though Severus was caring for her properly because I believe Dumbledore sees Severus as his pawn to be used and thrown away. And I believe he sees me much the same."

"Those are harsh accusations against the headmaster of Hogwarts."

"The facts that I have against him are much worse. I believe that he himself has engaged in contact unfitting his station. One example is allow a teacher to sexually assault a student."

"Harry, your situation of bonding to Severus could not be called..."

"I'm not talking about my soul bonding to Severus. I am talking about a teacher sexually assaulting Severus and when Severus told the headmaster he did nothing. There is a long list of actions that Dumbledore has done that are largely unknown about or hidden. I believe he is just as evil as Voldemort if not more so. I do not have

the time at present to go into a long list verbally, but I have had my elf prepare some documents. Many documents that illustrate the character that I believe Dumbledore truly is. I expect all of them to be available to the wizarding world."

"Harry, why are you coming forward now?"

"Because right now Severus is likely being raped by Voldemort. Right now, he is captured because he sacrificed himself to save me like he always does. I am preparing and honing my skills as best I can in this short amount of time, but every second that Severus is not in my arms I am angrier and more terrified for his safety. I know that our relationship started out as necessity, but I love him with my whole being and should he die, I don't plan to live long after. I need an army. I need an army loyal to me not to a wolf disguised as a friendly face. Not just to save Severus, but to end this war. Severus once told me that he is not loyal to either side because both of the kings are corrupt. Then he told me that if I would be his king, he would be loyal to me. I don't want any pawns. No one is a throw away piece. Severus is my queen and I will do everything to save him and to end this war, but I am one person and our army is small. I do not want to vanquish one king only for the other to use it as his opportunity to rise in power. I'm prepared to lay down my life for my most loved one and for everyone's, but I need help. Any help. I sure there will be many who do not believe me. I also once thought of Dumbledore as a savior and even a father figure, but he isn't. He is a corrupted individual with hidden ideals. I don't know his plan, but I fear it more than Voldemort's."

Chapter 55: The elves

It was almost overnight.

Nearly half of the students at Hogwarts were taken back to their homes. The school didn't know what to do but couldn't very well keep them against the parents wishes.

True to her oath, Rita printed the interview word for word. The pages of evidence against the headmaster were paraphrased at the end and there was information on where the pages could be read at length. Even if only a third was true, that would be enough to send him to Azkaban.

And the number of people that came forth against him was astronomical.

With squibs alone there were nearly a dozen that claimed that Albus Dumbledore stole their magic. All of them were males. Males who magic would not come forth even though they claim that they had magic as infants. Their parents were visited by the headmaster and he informed them that their child must not be allowed to use their magic lest it taint them the same way it did to you know who. And because Dumbledore is respected, and because he informed the parents that he was 'protecting' their child and the wizarding world by not allowing another child to turn to the dark side, they agreed believing an alive magicless child was better than an evil dead one.

The magical world is searching for me. Asking questions.

Niffy lightly taps my head.

"You need to focus." She says. "Sevy is already in the snake's den and we just aggravated the snake. Focus on your bond to him." I don't know how to do that. "Even if you can give him a moment of relief that is good enough." She breathes evenly and deeply. "Think only of him right now. Think of the burdens that he is going through and think of a shield around him."

I'm trying.

"Niffy, I don't know how." She taps my head a bit harder.

"It may be difficult at first. But do not put doubt in your head. The bond will hear the doubt. It will be physically and mentally taxing to hold the bond. If you cannot hold it for long then that is fine.

The room is quiet until all I can hear is my breathing. My breathing and something pounding in my ears. My own heart is thrumming almost silently, but this sound. This heart beat is sporadic and stressed. The more I listen to that sound the more my body ache. My shoulders are stiff. My left arm burns. My back feels like knives are shooting up throughout it.

I feel like I'm about to puke. I feel like I'm about to puke but there is nothing in my stomach. My legs will not move no matter how much I tell them too.

It's my own scream that breaks me from the trance.

Niffy smiles at me. It isn't a happy look.

"Very good." She says.

"That... did I do it?" She nods slowly.

"Yes. As much as you can handle. No one can tell you what your limits are, but every moment you suffer, he isn't. I am not afraid that mad man will kill Severus. But the torture he is undergoing may make Severus wish for death.

A knock on my door is the warning I get before Zend comes in.

It is Zend's turn after all. Before Niffy, Brux was in here meditating. He was telling me outcomes that may or may not happen. The way he explained to me is:

Nothing is certain only probable. I have a ten percent chance of being fully victorious in this war. Meaning, Severus, myself, my friends will all live. Ten percent. He says there are ways to improve that, but alone I am not likely to be victorious. He said learning

wandless magic and healing can increase those odds. Having loyal people fight on my side of the war will increase those odds. That doesn't make it a guarantee, but nothing is ever a guarantee. Brux looked at the wall with his unseeing eyes. He told me that he sees everything with different sight. He said that there is less than a one percent chance that Voldemort could turn himself in, but there is a reality where that could happen. He said there is a reality where I join Voldemort and torture Severus the same way he does. Brux smiles grimly. He says that he's seen everyone as good and everyone as evil and to not put to much stake into what could happen and to just do what I feel I must.

He said there was nothing his powers could teach me except to be less trusting. Maybe he could sense my unease and he smiled gently. He said there was also a reality where Severus was infatuated with Voldemort and killed Wendy and all the rest of his house elves. Brux told me to just follow my instincts because he wasted so much time not trusting Severus because there was such a high chance that he would betray them. Still he ran through scenarios. Things I could reasonably expect. He didn't stay long. Instead he said that him going through probabilities wasn't increasing my chances of success, but he was wasting my time when I could be practicing something that could. And now Zend is here.

" I... I am h.. he... here to help wi... with your mending." Zend helps his adoptive mother up and she leaves us to our training. There is still a dull ache, and Zend seems to already know. "S...Sevy is stro... Sto...St..." His face scrunches in anger. "STRONG!" He shouts to get the word out.

"That doesn't mean that he's okay." Zend nods. He holds out his small hands palm up. There is a faint white glowing. Then he touches me and all the aches shooting up my spine vanish almost immediately.

"T..This is all I... I can d...do." He looks at his palms. "My magic is w.. w.. weak. But But But i.. it is steady. You n...ne..need to to to have st.. steady magic."

I watch him with little thought take out a dagger and slice his shoulder. The cut is very small and only a few drops of blood trickle

out. He nods to me silently telling me to attempt to heal him. I'm not sure where to start or even what to do. He just showed me his palms and they were glowing. He just touched me and the pain was gone. At my hesitance he sighs.

"It is is is hard for m..me t...to to to talk. You have to to want to heal. You you you you have to to to to to..." He stops talking and grimaces. Taking a few deep breaths he starts again. "You have to care." He says quickly to hurry and get the words out.

"I do care, but that doesn't mean that I know how." He grabs my palms and lays his flat on top of mine. I can feel the stream of magic. It's a constant flow that doesn't sputter or lurch. It is consistent. Likewise I feel my own magic trying to match his and while my own is much stronger, it raises and falls like a heart beat. I cannot maintain a steady amount.

"S...Sevy's magic is v... very steady. H... H...He c...could could could b..be a good h....healer. Sevy just d...doesn't care." The words are said very coldly. I know it's not his contempt for Severus. All of the elves love him. "He doesn't c...care about him.. him ..himself." Zend breaths slowly in and out and his magic still trickles like a stream. "He is numb. Hurt to much." Zend's eyes stare into mine and although he's not speaking I understand. Severus isn't a bad person. Anyone that truly knows him knows that. But how much does someone have to be hurt before they stop caring about themselves. I understand of course. It's difficult to be hurt in the way he has and still cherish yourself and others. It's easier... safer to lock yourself away from compassion.

"Severus cares. About us." Zend nods.

"Yes." He agrees one worded. "If... if... if you do not v...v...value y..your own safety then you will will will will never be a good healer. A... healers job is t... to heal. A healing dying kills count... count...count...countless. Sevy is content to to to die." The words are said with disgust. He smiles weakly. "I.. I.. I.. cannot heal sadness. I.. I.. I.. cannot heal a fractured mind like like like like I c...can a fractured arm." Zend is so young to be forced to feel these things. "Mm..mmm...maybe because I..I am not not not not strong enough." He looks at me hopefully. "You are strong." He says

clearly. "Maybe you can."

Chapter 56: A kiss to die for

A week. I gave myself and my army a week to plan. A week to plan something we had prepared for since many of us started school. I refused to leave Severus any longer than that. I'm sure even that short period of time was an eternity. I am in no way completely prepared, but I feel I never will be.

Niffy and her children have done all that they can to try and aid me in the short period of time since I joined them at this safe house. Everyday I've spent hours protecting Severus until my magic simply cannot anymore. Severus protected me at all times. Niffy explained that while my own magic is more powerful, I am still young and don't have access to all of it yet. She told me that I'm overusing my magic and burning out to quickly. For now, she said that it isn't our main concern. It isn't uncommon for young witches and wizards to over complicate magic.

Draco for his part kept me informed. He gave me updates on Severus as well as security and the layout of Voldemort's hide out. It's practically a maze and I've had to memorize the layout as well as everyone else.

Hermione has been in charge of assembling the portkeys for everybody in the hopes that we will minimize injuries and deaths.

For now, I'm not concerned over the other potential dark lord. Dumbledore is under a lot of suspicion right now. He's being investigated and everyday the daily prophet seems to have more speculated rumors about the once well respected man. After this war- after I get my husband back then I will deal with Dumbledore. For now. Rescuing Severus is my priority.

His wand still insists on casting shielding spells instead of offensive spells half the time. It doesn't listen to me, but is intent on my safety. That's another reason I'm thankful for the practice with wandless magic. Not having to use a wand actually comes somewhat naturally to me. With practice, I would feel more

comfortable, but I just don't have the time.

A week is almost up.

We have two days until our plan is put into motion. I'm getting better at taking Severus's pain. It's getting easier to search out his unique magic and hold it protectively. The pain is at times excruciating and each time Severus seems more exhausted. Poppy wanted to wait longer until I was more prepared. I was angry at first. Wasn't she worried. I know that she knows the extent that Severus suffers under that madman's control. I know she's one of the few people that genuinely cares about him.

"Of course I'm worried about him." She says patiently at my outburst. "Severus is a good person and deserves to be safe and cared for. No one deserves what he is forced to go through, but this is a war. While the ends do not justify the means, I know Severus understand. Your success in ending this war must come first. And while I want to storm into that awful hell, I cannot. Because my place is not to fight. And make no mistake. It will be a bloodbath."

She spent the length of the week wringing her hands and preparing for the potential injured.

The plan was for each of us to break into groups of three. It was essentially going to be a game of cat and mouse. Strike fast and retreat before they have time to respond. Each group will have a portkey that will only work if someone in our army activates it. Hermione said that was the trickiest part. She essentially used Draco's dark mark as a control. She apologized to him and explained that she was not able to include him as one that can activate it.

If the group is in danger. If they are outnumbered. If a member is injured. All three are to portkey back immediately. Poppy will be here to heal them as quickly as possible. From there. As groups return, new groups of three will form and return. Take out death eaters if you can but live to fight another day above all else. There are about thirty in our army. Ten groups. Our numbers have grown but not by much. I was very selective with who I trusted. Luna Lovegood swings her feet absentmindedly. She was one of the ones I

felt most comfortable trusting. Odd as she is, she is good. And she's always had a bit of a soft spot for me and surprisingly enough- Severus.

Each group is shown the layout. Safe zones. Active zones. Megan has been quietly listening to all the plans. I know she's worried about her uncle. After this. There will be no more hiding. I'm sure Severus will want to meet her mothers. There will be no more hiding. Severus can just... be allowed to be happy.

Megan and Neville are in my group. Ron, Hermione, and Luna make up another. All these people are looking to their group that will help keep them alive and who they will help keep alive. Draco is the only one standing off on his own. He will apparate first. Draco will give Voldemort information on what is going on in the outside world. The false information mixed with bits of truth will pacify Voldemort and potentially put him off of alert. Draco has updated him nearly every day.

Every face I see is grim but hopeful. Everyone is afraid. Who will come back alive. Who will not. Luna seems to be the only one calm. She is happily chattering with little Wendy about something or other.

"Are you scared?" I ask her? She tilts her head at me as if not really understanding what I'm asking.

"Of what?" She asks in her sing song voice.

"This is going to be dangerous. There is a chance none of us will survive." She nods.

"Are you afraid of death Harry?" Her own words seem to change the tide of conversation like it often does.

"I think everyone is a little bit." Is the only response I can give.

"I'm not afraid." She says in her singsong voice. "I imagine it will feel like before you were born. Nothing. Nothing good or bad. It's scary maybe, but also a little exciting."

I've tried to not think about death to much. The pit in my stomach

only feels emptier and colder.

She continues. "I can see why it could be scary. If our consciousness ceased to exist and our existence eventually burned out that could be very sad." She seems to go back and forth. "But what will happen will happen. My mother was never afraid of death. She did so enjoy experimenting. Sadly, it was the end of her. Maybe had she not tinkered so much she would still be alive, but how much joy would she have lost. How much would she have gain if she did not die. These thoughts can consume you if you let them. It's best to just accept."

I don't know that I feel any better. Maybe I even feel worse.

"You've made your choice Harry. You are the chosen one and we will follow you. We may follow you to success or to ruin, but we have made our choice. Try to not dwell on what may happen and instead dwell on what you want to happen. Panic rarely solves anything. Instead it just wastes time." She smiles at me quite sweetly. "I believe Professor Snape is ready to come home. Don't you?"

Yes. She's right. There can be time for anxiety later. For now. If I have time to panic, I have time to prepare.

Until the day comes. If I thought the prepared but worried faces were gave before, it is even more so now. Draco himself looks positively ready to go into a panic.

"Draco." I squeeze his arm. "Are you going to be okay." Any show of emotion he had on his face vanishes.

"Severus has been teaching me to show only what I want others to see, most of my life. I will not be a reason that this plan does not go smoothly."

"I'm not talking about the plan. I'm talking about you." He smirks at me.

"There are things that scare me a lot more than the dark lord." The time is approaching. "You Gryffindors are crazy, and I hate to say it,

but I might have to borrow a bit of your Gryffindor courage though." He exhales a shaky breath and walks away from me. His calculated steps take him straight up to Neville. Draco's gray eyes stare threatening up into Neville's.

Draco is only a bit shorter, but his aggressive glare on his otherwise regal face makes him seem more confident. Fingers grasp Neville's shirt and the taller boy is pulled down to eye level.

"If we are likely to die, then I'm not going to go to my grave with regrets." Lips connect to lips forcefully and if not for Neville's hand tangling in the blond tresses, then I wouldn't know what to think. It's passionate but short. Draco presses his fingers to his lips and he smiles contentedly. "Yes. That's a kiss worth dying for." The moment of peace is gone almost immediately and replaced with contempt. He looks how I've always seen him. "I know you have a tendency to get strung up by your trousers, but do try to not die." He says somewhat coldly, but Neville doesn't seem fazed.

Draco looks to me and nods his head in affirmation. It's time. And he's ready. The crack of him vanishing breaks the silence as the onlookers began questioning amongst themselves if the two had been secretly dating all this time. It's only Neville who laughs.

"It's about bloody time. If the dope hadn't, I think I would have cornered him." Neville looks to me with a smirk. "Slytherins right." He shakes his head. "Well, are you ready to go rescue yours and end this war?"

Chapter 57: Saving the queen

We gave Draco half an hour. In that time he is to meet with Voldemort and give him the news of what can be expected. Immediately afterwards, Draco will be tasked with bringing food and water to Severus. Draco is always the one that Voldemort sends, but the guards outside the room make it impossible for Severus to escape. That is where Neville, Megan, and myself come in. We are to distract the guards- by any means necessary including killing them if it comes down to it. Neville, Megan, and Draco will then make sure to get Severus and meet back with us. The three of them will get Severus safely back, and I... will go in search of Voldemort.

It's time that this war ends.

The game of cat and mouse begins. We each look at our friends and silently hope that we all will make it back. We leave in waves starting with my group. They will wait about five minutes and the next group will leave. It's important that we do not all arrive at once, but it is equally important that we are not too scattered.

I know where he's being held, and my group rushes to get in position. We do not have long enough to take our time. It's obvious that we weren't expected, because I easily disarm the two guards before they notice we are even there. Neville casts a spell I have never heard before and the two guards are tangled up in thick vines that completely immobilize them. Megan casts a silencing charm around the two of them and then quickly follows it up with a vanishing spell.

"I think it's best is we maintain as low a profile as we can." She says with a smirk. For a moment she reminds me so much of my husband that it hurts. Neville and Megan stand guard while I go in and help Draco with Severus.

He's curled into the corner shivering. Draco seems to be wrapping a blanket around him for some semblance of modesty. Over and over

Severus is muttering but it's not until I'm right next to him that I hear what he's saying.

"I'm not here. I'm not here. I'm not here. I'm not here."

"Is he okay?" I ask.

"He'll be better once we get him out of this place." Draco casts a spell to make Severus lighter that way we can easily lift him. I can feel so much of his pain that I have to fight to keep from passing out. At the sudden movement, Severus ends his manta mid sentence and looks at the two of us.

"I'm not... H.. Harry?" He looks at me as if he didn't fully believe. "Why... You shouldn't be here. Leave. Hurry."

"Shh. It's okay." This does little to calm him. Draco takes one arm, I take the other and we easily enough walk out of the room. The second we are outside, Neville takes the arm that was over my shoulder and smiles at Draco.

"Glad to see you two are okay." He says.

"Oh shove it Gryffindor. We don't have time for this." Draco retorts. Megan's wand is out and ready to cast any spell that she may need.

"Let's get going. You two can flirt once all of this is over."

"P..Princess?" Megan smiles at Severus.

"Don't worry. I'll protect you since the men folk need to help support you." She smiles very gently and lovingly at him. "But we don't have time for warm reunions right now either. Harry, get going." She nods to me. I know he will be safe.

"No. Dangerous."

"I'll see you when this is over Severus." And without giving myself so much as a kiss to my husband, I go in the opposite direction. Megan is right. There will be a time for all of that. After I defeat Voldemort. I have to trust that the others will do their part. But there is something that I've not told them.

The horcruxes. I am one. The others that existed have been dealt with, but I still exist and so does Nagini. Nagini is easy enough. But. I fully realize that I may die during this fight. I wanted to take my husband and kiss him knowing that it may be my last chance. At the same time though. I don't know that I would have went to my potential death afterwards.

I've done what I can. If I should die, then Dumbledore is already facing the scrutiny. I believe that others will make sure he doesn't become the true victor in this war. Assuming that I do not make it out of this.

I would be lying if I said that I wasn't scared, but Luna's words come back to me and they give me some false sense of calm. I am doing this.

I can hear various battles raging on all sides of me, but I go to none of their aids. That isn't where I'm needed right now. I continue to the 'thrown room' of sorts.

I'm actually surprised that there are no death eaters outside. Though that doesn't mean that there is not any inside. I calm my rapid breathing. Just on the other side of this door is my fate.

I open it and walk inside calmly as if I am not on the brink of panic.

Voldemort does not even startle. There are two death eaters at his side. I can't see behind the masks, but the long silver/blond hair is enough to let me know that at least on is Malfoy Sr. Both masked figures raise their wands to me, but Voldemort waves them away.

"Leave." Voldemort says to the two figures.

"But my lord..."

"I said leave." The tone remains calm. "I believe It is past due for me and this boy to have a nice long chat. We require privacy. So do as I've said. Leave."

Both seem reluctant, but not stupid enough to disobey. Then it is just me and him. The silence stretches between us. I have Severus's wand in my hand at my side, but I do not raise it to him. He doesn't

even bother to draw his out. He looks at me and sizes me up. I'm not sure what his intentions are, but this man as always is more than a little unsettling.

"Do you remember my name?" My asks calmly.

"What?"

"My name boy. My name. The real one. The one I was born with. I told you in the chamber of secrets."

"Tom Marvolo Riddle." He nods slowly.

"Would you believe that I actually experienced turmoil at casting aside my muggle name?" He doesn't seem to really be talking to me. Silently, he grasps his side as if he were in pain there.

"I've come to end this war." I say. I'm surprised by how calm I sound.

"No war ever ends." He's not looking at me. It's somewhat of a stalemate. Sure. I could fire off a curse at him, but as long as I am living, we both know I can't kill him. Why he isn't killing me though- I have no idea. "I suspect that you've already taken Severus from me again."

"By now, he's in a safe location." Again. Voldemort nods slowly.

"I'm tired." His eyes shift to me. "I'm sure by now, you are concerned. You know you cannot kill me. And I also cannot kill you." He seems so certain of this. His eyes are looking at Severus's wand. "He is single minded. How did you manage to make him love you so much. I did everything to try to win him over. But I was never really able." Again. I don't think he's talking to me even thought the words are directed at me. "It becomes quite tedious to be tossed away."

"You were cruel to him. You tortured him. You raped him." Why do I sound so calm!?

"Raped?" He tilts his head. His smile is broken and his eyes half crazed. "When is sex not rape?" The words sound so strange. "No

never means no. I'm right. I know that I'm right. Because I wasn't raped!" I take a step back and he seems to shake the words away. "No one ever really consents." He finally says. "Sex is always rape. That doesn't keep them from coming back for more though. It isn't supposed to feel good."

The wand is humming softly in my hand. I can feel it warming. It's ready to protect me whenever I need it.

"You are wrong. You were wrong. You hurt him."

"Who hasn't." He says icily. "You've hurt him. What more. Your cruel father tortured him and you mudblood mother abandoned him for the same man that tortured Severus till near suicide. He was so starved for affection by the time he came to me that you should really think me for keeping him safe." His words do not make me angry. He's right. To a certain extent.

"You still hurt him though. You could have been a decent lover to him and we probably wouldn't be in this situation right now. If you would have been gentle with him and loving then he probably would never have betrayed you." He tilts his head.

"Gentle? Loving?" Calm tears are sliding down his ash colored face. "I'm incapable of that. But maybe I should have told him that a long time ago."

"I'm not going to let you have him. It's time to end this war."

"You silly child. I already told you. No war ever ends. As long as there is someone seeking power, there will be another Tom Riddle and there will be another Voldemort."

"Why did you start this war?"

"To usurp the king of course." There isn't a king in the wizarding world. "Albus." He clarifies. "He was growing in power. I wanted him dead. That was my main goal, but my hatred towards muggles and muggleborns aided me in gaining followers. I doubt my followers ever knew that I myself was a half blood, and if they did, they certainly didn't put much stake in that rumor."

"What did he do to you?" He tilts his head silently. The smile looks broken again.

"Everything. He did everything."

Chapter 58: Who was the real villian?

He is standing before me. Old and sickly. He isn't nearly as terrifying as I've always pictured him. He extents his hand to me palm down. For a moment I just look at the gray skeleton-like hand.

"Lay yours over top mine and tell me what you feel." Is the clear voice. Nagini slithers protectively around her master's neck. She's such a large snake that I'm surprise her weight isn't crushing his frail frame. "I said lay yours over top mine and tell me what you feel." I shouldn't be listening to him. He's killed so many people. He's evil. He wants me dead. But all of my instincts tell me that this man is not a threat. I know the things he has done. I try to reason with myself. I try to remind myself that my own parents are dead because of this man. That doesn't stop me though. My palm closes over the top of his hand and it feels like ice.

"It's cold." Is the first thing I say.

"Yes yes. Aside from that. What do you feel." Fear? No. Anger... not even that. I don't feel anything.

"Nothing." He smiles as if I answered correctly.

"Yes. Nothing."

"What is your point!"

"I am displaying all of magic. I am not holding back anything. My magic was once very strong- as all the heirs to the founders are. It rivaled yours. Let's see if this sounds familiar. A mother dying shortly after her son was born, that son grew up treated as a freak. The mother was on all accounts loving, but still she was not allowed happiness."

"My mother was happy."

"I was talking about me you silly silly boy." His eyes look so tired. "My mother fell in love with a muggle boy. My mother who was mistreated by her family longed only to have someone care for her. She fed a love potion to a muggle boy and together they created life. But my mother couldn't bare to keep him under control. It wasn't real love. He left. He scored her and it devastated her. My mother fell into a deep depression. She could have been saved, but no one would bother." He looks at his hands. "I killed my father. A man that looked so much like me. A man who I got my name from. I hated him. I hated myself." He shakes his head. "But that came later. When I was sixteen."

"What does any of this have to do with the war!"

"Everything!" He shouts. "Do you know what happens to an unwanted child when they are shown affection?" He shakes his head. "Of course you know! He did it again. How easy it must have been for him to manipulate you. A charismatic man comes along and he could almost be considered fatherly. You of course want to please this well respected man because no one else has ever seen your worth. You are willing to do anything he asks of you. And you are even pleased when he asks you into his bed chambers. Yes. Of course it hurts. But it makes you so happy to be accepted. And how much time do you spend with him. Being caressed and touched."

I don't take a step back. I don't run away. Even though I want to. He's ignoring that I'm even here. I say nothing and just let him say whatever it is he needs to say. But I don't like it. I don't like what he's implying but I'm disillusioned enough to believe it.

"If you feel disgust then he punishes you, but if you feel pleasure... then you are dirty. How is wrong to feel pleasure at being held. No matter the pain!" He exhales. "He tells you that there is something he needs done... something only you can do. You are excited to prove yourself. After all. He was the first person to really care anything about you. He tells you that the rumors of a secret chamber are more than just rumors. He tells you that you are special... you of all people! Can you believe that. A boy that was unwanted by his father and who's mother would have loved you if she could have only let go of the past. A boy that was never adopted even though he was reasonably intelligent. A boy that was

terrified of how different he was. But this talented powerful man tells you that you are special. You follow his directions... go into the girls lavatory. Speak parseltongue."

He laughs.

"It opens! It actually opens! You can feel a magic that you have never felt before coursing through you. It's intoxicating. Intoxicating and frankly overwhelming. It feels like it's ripping you apart from the inside out. The vessel to hold the magic is just to small. She appears. A beautiful basilisk. She follows your orders because you are her master. But you much to young to know how to control such a large familiar. So she follows your thoughts. Your thoughts about how worthless muggles like your father are. Your thoughts about how dirty you are for having his blood in your veins. And she follows your orders that you didn't really give. Now you are a murderer, and he tells you as much. Still a child, you are now a murderer. He tells you that you can expect Azkaban. It doesn't matter that it was an accident." There are tears. Tears flowing from his dull eyes. "But don't worry. He can save you. And because he's such a kind man... you trust him."

"Voldemort." He doesn't listen. "Tom?" I try instead. His eyes seem to clear somewhat and he looks directly at me."

"Boy, do you know what it feels like to have your magic ripped from you. Your very essence. I had obtained my inheritance from Salazar Slytherin, only to have it taken from me seven hours later. It left me not much more than a squib. Do you know that I'm not the first that he's done that to? Before me, there was an heir to Hufflepuff. You see. His parents both killed themselves shortly after he was born. Albus Dumbledore the transfiguration teacher was so kind enough to take him in... even though he was basically a squib. Albus Dumbledore of course had a close connection to that family seeing as how he introduced his mother to his father. It was natural for him to take in the child and raise him much how he would his own. At least. On the surface. Potter. Heirs have a bond. Once they come into their inheritance- either through maturity or forced as was my case, heirs have the ability to locate the others. Who they are. Or who they were. That squib he took in was the heir of Hufflepuff. He killed himself shortly before I was born." He looks at

me. "You are the heir to Gryffindor. But you haven't come into your inheritance yet. I believe Dumbledore gave my mother the idea to use a love potion on my father, and I believe he manipulated the circumstances so that your mother would fall in love with your father."

"That's impossible. I don't trust Dumbledore, but how would he even know?"

"He's the heir to Ravenclaw." Is all he says. "Each heir must gain their inheritance in different ways. It's essentially to make sure that only those trust worthy enough will take on the immense magic. I'm not sure how he gained his inheritance because I've not done as much research on Rowena Ravenclaw. For the heir of Slytherin, they had to open the chamber of secrets. Normally it would be much harder for a young student to locate. It would essentially make sure that their heir was crafty and intelligent. I might would have never found it. Helga Hufflepuff's heir would have to prove their immense love and kindness. Harry. The heir of Gryffindor must prove their bravery. How many times have you been thrust into situations where you had to be brave. I can think of nothing braver than walking to your death in order to save a man you love and the whole of the wizarding world. You are the only one left. You are the only heir who's magic has not been taken from him. I don't know what he will accomplish by taking the magic of each founder, but I'm sure his magic will be immeasurable. I tried to kill you. If you were dead then he could not use you for whatever his plans are. But his trap was to well sprung. Your mother loved you in a way that I couldn't fathom because my own did not. Then he enlisted my lover. The only man that I cannot kill! Because I'm to much like my mother. I have never thought of myself as evil. I thought Severus understood. Tell me, how far do Dumbledore's plans go. Pitting my lover against me. You against my lover... making the two of you commence a soul bond. How long has he been planning this and for what purpose?"

"He's not going to succeed."

"How can you be so sure."

"Because. As soon as I defeat you, I'm going to defeat him. I believe

you. But I can't allow you to live. Regardless of your reasons, you've killed so many and this war will never end as long as you are alive. Severus deserves peace."

He's crying emptily.

"How do you intend to defeat me when a part of my soul is inside of you?"

"I don't know."

"You will love Severus?"

"For the rest of my life."

"You will kill that evil man?"

"Even if it takes my life."

"I want children." He says out of the blue.

"What?"

"I said that I want children. Or rather. I expect you to give him children. Adopted or biological. I don't really care."

"I don't really know what you are trying to say."

"You win." Is all he says. "I'm so tired. I'm half dead anyway. My lover. My wonderful lover is only hurt by my touch. I cannot kill that man who deserves a painful death. But you are young. You are strong. Your magic is ever-growing. I couldn't defeat you. Don't misunderstand. I hate you and your very existence. But I admit your single-minded determination to save Severus is admirable. I will take back my bit of soul in you as well as Nagini. She's a loyal pet. I would appreciate you caring for her... if I even have the right to ask for that." From where she was laying over his shoulder, she nuzzles against her master. He rubs two fingers overtop her head and fondly hisses at her. "It is what must be done beautiful."

He locks eyes with me and I can feel a weight I didn't know existed lift off of me. For a moment he looks healthier as he takes back in

the small fragments of his soul. He lifts the curling snake off of him and places her in my arms. She curls against me frantically but not aggressive. Again he hisses at her tell her that he will miss her. She hisses back a sad farewell. Then he opens his arms out wide.

"If it's not to much to ask... Could you use Sectumsempra? Say what you will, but I would like to die by his wand and by one of his spells."

Is this really how it will end. A dark wizard to broken to even fight. A man who gave up a long time ago. Certainly not good, but how evil he truly is, is up for debate.

I extend my hand and raise Severus's wand. It hums as if it were in pain. Nagini presses into my chest and though I should be afraid of this serpent that can kill me, I can feel that isn't her intention.

"When I die, all death eaters will know through their mark. I cannot speak for all of them, but some were not evil. Some were simply misguided." He exhales slowly. His eyes drift shut as if he were in a bliss filled dream. "Call it mercy. Or call it justice. You are much to pure for your soul to ever be tainted."

"Do you have any last words?" I ask. I know I don't owe this man anything, but...

"Destroy my wand for it has done great evil on my behalf. You will find my will with the goblins at Gringotts. I've left everything in my vault to Severus. If he will not take it- as I suspect he will not- then I ask that something be done with it. I don't know. Use your Gryffindor brain to think of something good. Love Severus as I was unable to do so properly. Maybe have a nice family. Kill Dumbledore."

"I'll take care of everything." I say.

"Then I am ready."

"Sectumsempra." The blood is already quickly flowing from his chest. He collapses to the ground, but doesn't attempt to slow the blood. There are tears. Nagini rushes from my arms and returns to

her master's side. She presses her scaly body against the cuts and he just pets her affectionately. There is a smile on his face despite the pain he must be under.

"I'm sorry that I wasn't a better master my pet. I ask one last thing of you. Will you protect my Severus. He can get so lonely."

I should be rejoicing. I know the things he has done to my husband. I know they are bad. I can't forgive those things, but I can't bring myself to hate this dying man right now.

"Don't trouble him, but if you could just tell him that you love him... for me..." He's crying and his voice is coming out in gasps. "I wasn't able to get him to love me. I was wrong. I was wrong. I hurt him even though I love him."

"I'll take care of him." His dull eyes are growing lifeless.

"I love you Severus." Is said in a hoarse voice and at the death of those words, I feel an intoxicating magic coursing through me that I have never felt before.

Chapter 59: Sleeping next to my husband

For a long moment, I just stare at the dead body at my feet. I swear that I will uphold his wishes in regards to Severus's happiness and the death of Dumbledore. Nagini is curled next her deceased master's chest. I actually killed someone. It's a sobering thought. For a long moment I can't seem to move. I feel the intoxicating magic. The somber acceptance of what I've done.

I know that it had to be done, but I will not forget my humanity. I can accept that I have killed while still feeling a sense of sadness. It's like I can't move though. I feel frozen in this spot.

How am I really that different from this man. If my situation was different, maybe I would be suffering the same fate. Nagini looks at me and hisses in a painfully sad tone.

"What now master?"

"I don't know. There is so much to do. We have to round up the rest of the deatheaters and then I need to check on Severus. I have to stop Dumbledore." She slithers to me and when I pick her up she curls against my neck. ***"I will carry out your master's orders."***

"Yes. You will. May I eat the rodent that changes into a human? He is plump and looks juicy."

I try to not laugh but ultimately I fail. All the tension. All the turmoil. It just melts.

"I think it's best if you refrain from killing an actual person. I think I'll need your help protecting Severus, and I do not want aurors to take you. For now, I think it's a good idea if we keep your existence as quiet as possible, but I promise that I will get you a nice juicy rat." I say in English. She nods reasonably satisfied.

When I leave the grand throne room, most of my army seems to be overtaking the few deatheaters that are still fighting. It's clear that they at least know that their master is no more. Masked figures are being restrained and aurors are making their way through. It was always planned to alert them... once I got what I came for. Nagini curls in my arms and I hiss lowly to calm her.

With all the death eaters either dead or subdued, my army begins congratulating themselves and checking to make sure their loved ones are safe. The aurors are transporting the deatheaters to Azkaban or a holding cell- depending on their level of danger and power.

And me.

I answer a few questions- confirm that Voldemort is in fact dead. I assure them that the snake I am holding is not a danger to anyone. Then apparate to the safe house.

Tom Riddle's body will be cremated and his ashes scattered because no villain deserves a marked grave. I have mixed feelings, but I understand why he's being treated that way. It was never him. Never completely him at least. There was always a puppet master in the shadows.

At the safe house, it's Draco who grabs me first.

"You did it!" He shouts excitedly then immediately eyes Nagini suspiciously.

"I'll explain about her later, but I trust that she's not going to hurt anyone. How did you already know that he was defeated?" He slowly shows me his bare left arm.

"I felt it vanish." I'm sure the other deatheaters that were taken in still had their marks. Did he revoke the mark on those that he felt were good? He's smiling at me and then his smile fades slightly. "Severus was worried."

"How is Severus?" I ask.

"I've forced him into a healing sleep." Poppy says touching my arm.

When did she...? never mind. "He was exhausted and understandably he had not eaten." Draco looks away guiltily.

"I was in charge of bringing him food. I tried so many times to get him to eat, but I couldn't. I was going to tell you... but I didn't think it would help the situation."

"He's isn't in as bad of shape as I had expected. Mental and psychological exhaustion was to be expected, but I expected many more physical injuries." She debates continuing but then she stops. "That is all I will tell you in mixed company concerning his injuries." I expect Draco to protest at least a little, but instead he nods.

I expect with news spreading, that the magical world will be in an uproar. First I ask Niffy to send a letter to Rita Skeeter. I wish to have a conference with her in three days if she is available. I think I will need those three days to talk with Severus. Ideally, I would like to have him with me for the interview.

Three days is as long as I feel comfortable remaining 'underground' so to speak. I know I and my army need time to lick our wounds. I don't feel comfortable waiting any longer just in case Dumbledore has a plan to use this to his advantage. With his reputation as shaky as it is, It will be more difficult for him to gain the trust of the media.

"I want to see him." I say before I can stop myself. I have no interest in upholding any certain 'image'. Yes, I'm worried about my friends that haven't all returned yet. Yes I want to check on everyone.

But I want to see my husband first.

I follow Poppy into my room. Severus was set up here. He's laying under the blankets that are pulled up to his waist. When it's just Poppy and I she continues her analysis of his health from earlier.

"I had expected to see a lot more anal trauma. I wouldn't go so far as to say that he was treated with care, but for the length of time that he was gone- he has gone to death eater meetings that only consisted of a few short hours and he has come back in much worse

shape than this. Severus has always had a weak stomach even as a student and often refuses to eat because he is prone to vomiting when under stress. So although I am not happy to see yet another regress in his weight, I'm not surprised by it. I hope with a bit of stability I can see him once again recovering in that aspect. Most of his injuries will be healed to completion within a few days."

"When will he wake up?" I ask.

"I would imagine soon." She says smiling. "I only put him in a light rest. His physical injuries were not very severe, but I worried for his mental exhaustion. He was concerned for your safety and would not have rested otherwise. I have no doubt that he will be unhappy with me when he wakes for forcing him to trust that you had everything under control."

Maybe I should be self-conscious, but I'm not as I reach out to grab his hand. It's comforting to finally be touching him again.

"Poppy, you will hear soon enough the full details, but I do not think that Tom Riddle was the villain that he was made out to be. He let me kill him." My fingers weave into Severus's dark hair.

"Harry, you've done your part in this war, please allow yourself to rest. Many are still returning, if there is any crisis or death, then I will wake you. Please rest for now. I understand you are under a lot of turmoil, it isn't a light burden to feel like there is a life on your hands. Regardless of the situation. Rest well knowing that the war is over."

No.

Tom was right.

The war is never over.

Still. Her smiling face makes me shrug the anxiety away. When she leaves, Nagini makes it known that she would like to be set down.

"I will be guarding you both from danger. Rest well masters." She says respectfully before slithering under the bed. It seems I really don't have a choice.

I pull back the covers and crawl into the bed beside him. I didn't realize how tired I actually am. It looks like Poppy put some underpants on him for modesty's sake, but the rest of him is bare so that the rest of his injuries can easily be tended too.

He actually looks like he's sleeping relatively peacefully, and I'm happy about that.

It feels so nice... so familiar to slide in next to him and pull those covers over us. He unconsciously relaxes when my arm lays over top him. He's safe.

He's safe.

I slide his wand under his pillow and I can feel it protectively humming. Nagini is under the bed guarding us. We have a literal army that has fought for us just outside of this room. We are safe.

There was once a time in my life where I felt more comfortable sleeping under the bed. It's hard to believe that it wasn't that long ago.

He saved me from that life.

He saved me.

And I'll save him.

You are right Tom, the war isn't over, but I'm not going to let that tamper the easy comfort I feel laying next to my husband. My husband who is finally safe in my arms once again.

Chapter 60: What do you want?

I'm not sure what woke me up, but when I opened my eyes, Severus was sitting upright in the bed. The blanket was pooled around his waist and he was looking directly at his left forearm.

The fingers on his right hand are prodding the pale flesh as if testing this 'illusion.'

"I killed him." My own somber voice seems to startle us both.

"I know." His voice sounds hoarse. "Am I odd for feeling strangely empty." He lets me grab his hand and squeeze it in my own. "He was the first person. The only person to ever really love me."

"I love you." He doesn't respond. And Tom died loving you. I think to myself. "Severus, he let me kill him. He took back the horcrux inside of me and then he let me kill him. He died loving you. His last wish was that I would take care of you since he was unable. I know this is a lot to take in, but he is gone. And you are safe now."

"You are different now. Your magic. It's like you aren't the same person." I wrap my arms around him.

"Severus. I'm the same insufferable boy that you've saved so many times, and I'm the same man that fell in love with you. I gained my inheritance as the heir to Gryffindor when I showed an act of bravery by defeating the dark lord. This power was always inside of me, just untapped. I honestly don't know much about it because it's pretty new. I'm going to use this new power of mine to keep you safe and to keep you happy. I haven't changed who I am."

"The mark is gone." He says. It feels like this statement is coming out of no where. Granted he's been looking at only his arm since I woke up, but still. This is Severus. He has a reason for everything he does and says.

"Yes. It is."

"I forgot what it felt like to be free." The words themselves could fool most. It's his tone. Thinly laced fear. He isn't saying it as if it were a good thing.

"Does it scare you?"

"It's been so long. I'm not loyal to the dark lord and I'm not loyal to Dumbledore. It's just you. It's always been you."

"I'm not going anywhere."

"The war is over."

"Severus?"

"The war is over. There's no reason for us to be bonded anymore. I don't want the war over!" All at once he's trembling and choking on shaky breaths. His hands clasp his hair as he curls into a pitiful ball. It's harder to calm him down than normal. It's like all hope is dead and he cannot be consoled.

"Severus. We aren't breaking the bond." He doesn't seem to be really listening. Not even when I pull him against my chest and stroke his hair. "I love you Severus."

"There's no reason for us to be bonded!"

"Severus. Calm down. If you keep shouting like that someone might come in. I'm not going anywhere and we aren't going to break the bond. You are as free or confined as you want to be. I love you."

"I don't know what's expected of me anymore. I'm not... there's nothing for me to do now."

"Shh." He at least lets me hold him against my chest. "Severus, you've been through a lot recently, I don't want you to stress yourself out." I stroke his hair and manage to ease him back into the bed. "Niffy." It only takes her name for her to immediately appear in the room. She smiles very gently and comfortingly at both of us. "Do you think you could prepare something light for Severus to eat? He might feel better with a bit on his stomach." Before she can move, Severus's cool calm tone stops her.

"Don't bother. I'm not hungry." I'm not surprised and apparently neither is Niffy.

"Niffy will be bringing food for both masters." She says pacifyingly. With a stern glance, she locks eyes with me. I know she's silently insisting that I get him to eat something. Anything. "Niffy will be back shortly."

He stays silent the entire time she's gone. I'm thankful that he's at least calmed down. She returns quickly with a couple of bowls of soup.

"It is late in the evening and most are asleep, I would recommend eating and then resting more." She smiles comfortingly again at both of us and then leaves. He doesn't move to grab the food, and I know he will not eat on his own accord, so I grab the nearest one and lift the spoon towards his lips.

"I do not need you to feed me." Is his snide comment.

"Stop being a prat and eat." I reply just as snarkily. I'm actually a bit glad to see him acting a bit closer to his norm.

"I'm not hungry so I'm not going to eat. And I most certainly do not need for you to feed me."

"Keep on refusing and I'll start making airplane noises. Just humor me on this one. I've been really worried and I just really want to take care of you a bit." His sharp eyes stab into me as if he expects me to back down, but when I don't, he reluctantly opens his mouth.

Chapped lips close around the silver spoon all the while, he refuses to make eye contact. It's like he's embarrassed to look at me right now. It takes him less time to swallow the second spoonful... and even less on the third. Still, he refuses to look at me the entire time. I don't press though.

I'm pleasantly surprised at how much he's eaten. Of the two bowls, I've been feeding him out of the fuller bowl, and it's almost gone. With just a few spoonful's to go, he turns his mouth away.

"No more. I can't anymore." That's fine. He ate more than I expected

and I don't want him to feel sick from overeating. "You should eat too." He's right. I should. But I don't.

"Why won't you look at me Severus?" He's wrapped his arms around himself.

"You shouldn't read to much into what I said."

"What are you talking about?"

"When I gave you my wand... when I gave you the portkey to this place. You shouldn't think to much about what I said at that time."

"Do you mean when you told me that you love me?"

"It was said in a moment of passion and shouldn't be taken at face value." He refuses to look me in the eyes. "Please forget I ever said such a thing."

"You're lying. I don't know why you're lying, but you are. You wouldn't say something like that in the heat of the moment if you didn't absolutely mean it. Now. Why are you lying to me?"

"Potter."

"We are not backtracking Severus. You love me. Now. Why is it that you would rather I believe otherwise?" He's quite for a moment. I can tell he's debating on continuing the lie, but ultimately he just gives in.

"You are still very young. You should not feel obligated to stay with... someone like me."

"Severus. If you didn't love me and you had no intention of being with me in a romantic sense, I would still love you. I have no interest in being with anyone else. The bond makes it where we will always be connected. The bond isn't going to be broken. I'm not going to let you break it. If you think distancing yourself from me will give me a chance at being with someone else, then you are wrong. It's either you or no one. Distancing yourself will not give me a chance at happiness, all that you will accomplish by lying about your feelings is heartache for both of us."

"Harry..."

"I'm not rushing you. I'm not pressuring you. If you don't want anything romantic then that's fine. But we will be part of each other's life. And I am going to love you for the rest of mine. That is something that isn't going to change."

He looks so unsure. So guarded and yet so vulnerable.

"Harry..."

"I love you Severus." His ears are tinted pink and I want to taste them so much.

"I love you as well." His words are muffled and said quickly as if he's afraid he will not be able to say it all, but still the words hang between us. "What happened while I was gone?" He says as if he were simply on vacation.

"Draco kissed Neville. That's really the only big thing. It seems like Draco's love is returned too. I wouldn't be surprised if they were sucking face right now."

"Good." He's smiling gently. Knees are pulled up to his chest and he wraps his arms around him. "I'm glad that worked out."

"I'm sure he will tell you all about it when you are feeling a bit better."

"I have no doubt. He's been more than a bit obsessed for a while." The air is tense and somewhat uncomfortable between us. He's trying to sound casual and I'm trying to not stress him further. Maybe he just needs some time.

"I'll let you rest." I say standing up. From his curled position he looks up at me. "Is there anything you want or need?" Pale chapped lips part before closing. "Anything at all." I wait for a long time for him to say anything. But he doesn't. Minutes tick on. Trying to not pressure him, I smile again. "Then I'll let you rest. If you need anything from me, you can just ask Niffy to get me. Rest well." I kiss the top of his head, but before I can leave, I feel his fingers curl around the fabric of my shirt.

"I want you to stay." He's intently looking away from me, but his fingers curl more securely. "I want you to stay." He says again.

"Are you sure? Severus I understand if you need a bit of time."

"You've given me time."

"Well I can give more."

"I want you to stay." His pale ears are pink. I can hear a heart pounding and I don't know if it's his or mine. There is an edge of excited panic stemming from him and I'm not wholly sure why.

"What else do you want Severus?"

"I don't know what I'm allowed to want." It feels like his eyes connect with mine for the first time. It feels like we are finally seeing each other.

"Anything." His mouth hangs open as he struggles to form his thoughts into words.

"The mark is gone." For a moment I feel like we are regressing again. "The mark is gone, and I am not longer bonded to anyone other than you."

"Yes?"

"I don't belong to anyone. There isn't anything expected of me right now."

"No. There isn't. I just want you to be able to do whatever you want. We will talk more about it when you are fully healed, but Dumbledore's reign will be coming to an end soon. No one has any control over you. All you have to do is decide what you want for yourself." I smile at him. "So please Severus, tell me what it is that you want." His arms wrap around himself.

"I want for you to hold me." He sounds so vulnerable. So nervous. His voice cracks a bit in his attempt to keep his tone even.

"Of course Severus." I say laughing a bit. He was making out like he

was going to ask for the impossible. It's not unusual for me to cuddle against him. My arms close around him and immediately I can hear his heart pounding desperately. "There." His eyes dart away from me.

"No..." He says. Did I do something wrong? "H.. Harry, that's not what I meant. I want you to embrace me... intimately. If... if that's even something you still want."

"Severus are you sure this is something that you..."

"Please don't make me ask more. This isn't exactly easy for me. I never thought that I would ever want someone to..." His dark eyes connect with mine and all of his pale features are flushed healthily, "Want someone to make love to me."

Chapter 61: Coming together

The first kiss is how I presume most to be. Shy and tentative. Exploring. Slow. I can feel the nervousness like electricity between us, but it neither slows us down or deters us. It feels like all the build up is finally releasing and neither of us are quick to rush to the conclusion.

Just like the rest of our relationship, we are going at our own pace. If he pulls away from me to gasp for air, I give him the time to come back to his senses. I give him all the time he needs to press the pads of his fingers against his kiss swollen lips. I give him all the time to softly smile.

Is he completely prepared for what is to come? No. No. But neither am I. The unsureness is raw against my skin and I have to remind myself that even if it's not perfect, because it's him and me, it will still be perfect.

His tongue is intoxicating. His body language more submissive than I've ever seen before. Not detached from the situation though. Severus is still very much present in our bout of making out. He's active in his hesitant touches, but his overall posture is small and compliant.

Submissive doesn't mean inattentive.

This time when he pulls away panting, his fingers twist into mine until he's desperately clutching my hand. His expressive dark eyes are sealed tightly shut.

"Harry, I'm scared." And although I don't want him to feel that way, I can't help but smile. Because his hand never lets go of mine and he's finally relying on me.

"Do you want to stop?" I ask while smoothing his hair- even though I already know his answer.

"No." He swallows nervously then opens his eyes. Two twin pools of dark abyss search my eyes as if trying to find an answer to a question he hasn't asked. "Please don't stop."

"Alright Severus. Can I take off your underwear or do you want to keep going like this for longer?" He doesn't answer and instead just starts shimmying the clothes down his hips.

And Merlin he's hard.

"It's not fair that you are still dressed." He says.

It's a little embarrassing undressing in front of him. I've always been a bit modest, and I know that I'm not exactly built like most guys my age. Maybe it was the neglect that stunted my growth. Severus is still taller than me, but I'm definitely broader than him- not that that means much. To his credit, he doesn't look to much while I undress just like I don't look to much at him. Steeling my crazy nerves, I turn to face him, he's not looking at me. His voice sounds unsure.

"I know I'm not exactly much to look at." Severus has his knees pulled up to his chest. His face is turned completely away from me. Creamy skin tempts me. Merlin, I want him.

"Severus." He doesn't respond. "Severus look at me." I patiently wait. When he does eventually face me, his mouth hangs slightly agape as he stares unabashed. "Does it look like I'm unattracted to you?"

"You're hard."

"Yea." Really Harry! Is that the best you can respond? "So are you." His pale features take on a much pinker tint as he looks down.

"Yea." He is so adorable.

"Severus. Can I see?" Lightly I press against his chest to ease him down. He's nervous, but he does relax against the bed. His hair fans out around him and I give him a minute to calm his nerves. Lightly I place my hand on his stomach and with the smallest amount of pressure, I trace the lines of his body. "It's okay that we are both nervous." Admitting this out loud certainly helps. "Can I see you

Severus?"

Knees separate as his hands crease the sheets under him. His chest is rising and falling somewhat evenly.

"Just like that. Severus, may I touch you?" His mouth hangs open for a moment as he finds words. Tears dot his eyes, but I don't say anything. It's okay Severus. I understand. You don't have to explain why you are crying. I understand. I've also never been given the option for consent. But I'm not going to take that choice from you.

Gradually he nods and I try to smile comfortingly at him. His erection is laying flatly against his stomach; keeping my movements as nonthreatening as possible, I firmly squeeze the already throbbing organ.

"Ahh." Just this has Severus whimpering breathy exhales. Up and down. Precum is already slicking my hand. Dark eyes close as his breathing becomes faster. His toes are curling while his back arches. It's such a turn on to watch this stoic man lose himself to pleasure. "No more! Harry. No more. I'll cum."

Adorable. Does he not even realize that it's him thrusting into my hand.

His larger hand closes over mine as he frantically makes me stroke him faster.

"Keep going Severus. You look beautiful like this."

"Oh!" His mouth is open in a silent scream and his body contracts suddenly. My hand is covered in his thick cum. "I... I'm sorry." He comes down from his high almost immediately and there is shame on his face. I'm sure he didn't mean to finish so quickly.

"Why are you apologizing? I'm glad that you felt good." With my not dirty hand, I stroke his hair comfortingly. I don't want reality to set in and him suddenly feel uncomfortable. He's not in any danger. He's safe.

"You didn't though. I was the only one that finished."

"Did you still want to have sex?" I ask casually. Inside I'm nervous, but I'm trying to at least seem confident in the hopes that it will comfort him.

"Yes... if you wanted to that is."

"Of course, I do. But I would have to stretch you first." His eyes widen having forgotten that necessary step.

"I'll... I can go do that now."

"Severus, I would prefer being the one to do it. I know it might be a little embarrassing, but I would really like to be the one to prepare you." His emotions are masked underneath his sharp features. Sink or swim. Trust or don't. Give in. Or hold back. Yes. It's scary. It's scary.

"It's a very... intimate thing."

"Yes. It is Severus. But I've cleaned you before. I held you when you were drugged. I've been next to you when you were unconscious. I didn't take advantage then, and I will not now. All I will do, is stretch you. I will be thorough, but I would not take advantage of your trust in me. Will you let me stretch you Severus?"

"We don't have any lubrication at hand." I actually laugh.

"Well, it just so happens that I have some at hand. Or at least on my hand."

"You want to use my own... Well... I suppose it would make a good substitute. We certainly couldn't engage in anal intercourse without some sort of lubrication... and it is already all over your hand."

"That isn't sounding like a 'no'."

"You would be gentle...? It's been my experience that men... particularly inexperienced men aren't gentle. They aren't use to holding back. And it would only be the second time that you've had sex. Harry. I really don't like pain."

"And I wouldn't feel good if you were in pain. That's why I want to

be the one to stretch you. That way, I know that you are as ready as you can be. The first time we had sex, I stopped because it was obvious that I was hurting you... emotionally. I didn't feel the way I feel for you now, back then. And I still didn't want to hurt you. I'm going to be very gentle with you Severus. If there's something you don't want, then I don't want it either."

I don't know how to respond when he sits up. And I still don't know how to respond when he presses himself against my chest. His arms wrap around me lightly. Dark hair is tickling my chin.

"This is going to be so embarrassing." I hear him mumble mostly to himself then he returns to the bed. Face down on his knees with his bum partially in the air. His face is buried in the pillow and I know this really must be difficult for him.

"I'm going to start Severus. If you don't like something just tell me and I promise I'll stop."

My first priority is to not scare him. I don't want to startle him. I don't want to make him second guess what he wants because I acted to brash. Prodding slowly and gently with my middle finger, I'm amazed at how soft he is inside. And my finger seems to be going inside pretty easily.

Regardless, I continue with just one finger. Giving him all the time he needs to get accustomed to it... or to change his mind.

"That's okay. You can add another finger now." His voice sounds hoarse. Scared. Frightened.

"Not yet. I don't want to go to fast. If you want me to stop, then please tell me."

"It doesn't hurt just add another finger already."

"No. I'm the one preparing you Severus, and I don't think you are ready yet." Laying next to him, I pull him mostly on top of me. My finger lazily stroking his insides making sure to never go to fast. "Here. Lay like this. I bet this is more comfortable."

"I've never had anyone prepare me before. Not like this at least."

"Does it feel good?" I ask even though I can feel his erection pressing into my side.

"Yes. But I don't know why. I never thought I would want to be touched." Good. Having him talk has calmed him down. He likes gentle skin ship. He likes being coddled. Held.

"I'm going to add a second finger now. Tell me if you don't like it or if it is hurting." He nods and I give him a minute to make sure he's okay with me continuing. The second finger has a bit more resistance, but it's still pretty easy to scissor inside of him.

"You don't have to be so afraid of hurting me. I've been used enough times where my body is accustomed to being taken." The words drip self contempt. "You don't have to handle me like I'm something fragile."

"Severus, I'm touching you like this because this is how I want to touch you. I want to be gentle with you. I want to take things slow. I want to make sure that I make you feel good. I'm not going to disregard your past, but you are free of all that now. I want for you to be only mine. If that's what you want as well." My fingers bend inside and frantically he's rubbing against me. "Are you ready for me to add a third finger?" He's nodding but never slowing the wonderful friction of his rubbing against mine. He hisses out a pained sound of pleasure once all three fingers are inside of him. "Is it to much? Do you want me to go back to two."

"It's fine. Doesn't hurt."

"It sounds like you are in a lot of pain though." His hands are bunching in the sheets as he crawls against me urgently.

"N..not pain." He's gasping. "Harry."

"I have you Severus. I'm not letting you go. You're safe." I love him so much. He's so soft and warm inside. It doesn't take long before I feel like his body is ready for more. He's stretching easily and with little to no pain. "Severus. Are you okay?"

"Yes." He sounds breathless.

"Do you want to keep going. It's okay if you don't. I'm not pressuring you. If you think this is your limit then we can stop."

"Do you not want to?" He sounds so small. "I know that it might be a turn off to know the extent of how I've been violated, but I can't help that."

"Severus. Of course I want to keep going. Of course I want to touch you more and make love to you. But I'm not in any rush. Don't you understand, I love you. I love you and want to be intimate with you, but not at the expense of your trust. I do not want you to make this decision to appease me. I want you to decide if this is something you want. And if it's not, then we will back up and take things slower. If it is, then of course that will make me happy. But I'm not in any rush. We have the rest of our lives to take our time."

"I'm scared." I withdraw my fingers and comfortably lay my hand over his bottom. My other hand comfortingly traces up the back of his head and scratches his scalp soothingly.

"I know you are."

"But I want to keep going." With my hand cupping his hip I ease him into a different position.

"Severus, I want you to take the lead. Move at your own pace."

"Harry, I've never done that before."

"Good. Then we both are experiencing something new." I don't rush him even though I'm needy. I will be patient. I will make sure that we go at his pace... whatever pace that may be. He penetrates himself slowly and the soft heat is already intoxicating. It didn't feel like this the first time. It didn't feel good like this. It didn't feel like I was melting.

"I have to... wait for a minute until I get use to it inside." I distract myself by stroking his hip and then eventually his erection. He's beautiful.

"I love you." The words slip out without any filter and it feels good to say it so naturally. His own features turn a cute shade of pink as

he stammers out a muffled 'I love you too.' I want to kiss him right now. I want to devour his lips and swallow his moans. But before I can put any thought into action, he's moving at a gloriously slow pace. It's painfully deliberate. It's enough pleasure to tempt me into craving more. And his dark hair is falling around him. Lip bitten by dull teeth in a futile attempt at restraining his voice.

His voice is erotic. The mews and groans. Whimpers. Moans.

His erection that is leaking pools of precum on my stomach.

"You look so beautiful."

"I don't need your moronic attempts at flattery. I'm fully aware of what I look like and it's anything but beautiful."

"How could someone so intelligent be so naïve. Severus, you are a very tempting person." Both of his hands are on my chest steadying himself. I'm not sure if he's ignoring me or if he's to lost in his pleasure to really care what I've said.

Long lean limbs. Pert pink nipples. Certainly he has striking prominent features. It's easy for the slightest turmoil in his mood to make his features seem harsh. But I've been around him a lot. I've seen him exhausted and angry. I've seen him scared and fearless. I've seen him relaxed and stressed. His strong features are pulled into expressions of pleasure, but he's calm right now. As riled up as he is, as terrified as I know he has to be, he's relaxed. He's trusting. And his body is completely open.

He's vulnerable and open to any abuse I could throw at him with only the hope that I wouldn't to comfort him. He trusts me.

One day, I'd like to have him under me. One day maybe I will take him faster or rougher. Who knows. But for right now, I'm satisfied watching him find pleasure in pleasure.

"Severus. You look so beautiful."

"Stop saying such nonsense." He keeps squeezing around me. Adorable. It's turning him on to be complimented.

"It's not nonsense. I'm completely turned on by you. You must not have any idea how tempting you are. Of course I'll say you're beautiful. How could I see you any other way?"

"I don't like being made fun of!"

"And I don't like being called a liar." I smile up at him. "You are going to have to get use to this Severus. Now that I have you back again, I'm not going to hold back. I'm going to tell you all the time how beautiful you are and how much I love you. I'm going to tell you it so much you'll be sick of hearing it." He's so tight around me that I feel like I could cum any minute. I'm not experienced enough to last long. "Severus," I start to tell him but before I can finish, his chest is pressed against my own. Arms wrap around my neck.

"Harry. It's never felt like this. I can't anymore. Please just move. I can't... I can't." His trembling body clings to me. "It's too much. I need to... Please hurry, I need to cum." Sporadic breathing in my ear spurs my body automatically. One hand pulls his hair at his scalp while the other squeezes his pale globes. His long body is convulsing from overstimulation. It feels so good to pump into him.

"Beautiful."

"Don't tease me!" He whines in an adorably pitiful way.

"Severus. I love you. I love you. Love you." I'm going to cum soon. "Severus. I'm about to cum, I have to pull out." Before I can, his hips grind down. So good.

"No." His face is pressed against my shoulder. "Please. Don't pull out."

"Severus. I have to. If I don't pull out now I'll end up coming inside you." His voice is husky and full of need.

"That's fine. Harry, you can cum inside. Please. Don't pull out." He moans throatily. "I want you too." Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

I'm not sure if he finishes first of me, but whoever was second followed right after the first. He clung to me as I desperately thrusted into him and it was only afterwards that I realized I was

holding him just as tight.

His body feels like liquid on top of me and I'm much to sated and comfortable to move. Severus on the other hand moves just enough to grasp my hand in his.

"Will you stay tonight. I sleep better when you are next to me." I laugh lightly at how wonderful it is to have him so open with me.

"I never had any intention of leaving."

And I never will.

Chapter 62: Getting back to life

We were left alone. Aside from Poppy checking to make sure that Severus was healing properly and Niffy making sure that we both ate, we were left alone. Severus and I talked. As if we were trying to get to know one another. We talked openly. About everything and nothing. His childhood. My own. My mother. My father. His parents- or lack thereof. We talked about our wants and hopes for the future. We talked about fears. We talked about children.

Severus nearly had a panic attack when Nagini slithered out from under the bed, but when I grabbed her up and explained she wasn't a threat to us he relaxed. I don't think it's because he trusts the large snake but instead because he trusts me. And then I told him.

"Tom Riddle allowed me to kill him. He took back the Horcrux inside of me and Nagini and then he let me kill him. He asked me to use your spell Sectumsempra. He told me that he wanted to die by your spell and by your wand. Severus, what he did to you is unforgivable, but I think what was done to him is just as unforgivable. Dumbledore has to be stopped. Thus far, no one knows everything. Just little bits of the story. I know that it feels... terrifying to go right back into a war, but Tom was never the real threat."

"What do you propose we do?" He asks. It's strange to see him so open. So relaxed. Without the dark mark, he really is free.

"I already have an interview set up with Rita Skeeter. The two of us are going to out Dumbledore for the vial man he really is. If the impossible happens and he gives himself up, then we will let the officials handle it. In the more likely event that this causes a rift in the magical world between those that trust him and those that don't then, I'll do what I have to in order to kill him."

"Harry."

"Severus, the only people more loyal and devoted than Voldemort's

followers are those that are loyal to Dumbledore. You know that. I believe many will not be easily convinced. If I have to kill him, there is a chance that not even being the 'boy who lived' or the boy who killed Voldemort will matter. There is a chance that I may be apprehended and potentially thrown in Azkaban." Nagini slithers tightly around me. I try to not show any fear. I know she isn't trying to hurt me so much as comfort me.

"Then we will leave the magical world entirely. If it comes to that, then we can be fugitives."

"No. I'm not going to be perceived as another threat to the magical world. If it comes down to being arrested, then I will go without a fight. After I kill Dumbledore."

"No!" The single word comes out as a growl. His dark piercing eyes are stabbing into me and for the first time in a while, I'm seeing the man I fell in love with. All bite and unyielding. "We will either be fugitives together or locked up together. I'm not doing this again. Stop acting like a brat, running off and throwing your life away. I'm sick of your idiotic pace." He crosses his arms in his signature 'try to fight me on this' pose. And Merlin I love him.

"It's time that this war finally comes to an end." Is all I say.

"Even if you do leave this up to the officials, we both know that will not be enough. They will be as useful as they were when trying to stop Voldemort. This will come down to us stopping him. We both know that."

"I was hoping to live in denial a bit longer, but yes. I suspect that I'll have to fight him., and considering last time I was thrown across the room like a toy, I'm not so sure I can win."

"We will together." He says. His face isn't grave or confident. But I recognize it for what it is. We will either succeed together. Or die together. There will be no in-between. "You'll need a new wand."

"Actually. I'm not so sure that I will." He raises his eyebrow silently asking me to continue. "I'm the heir to Gryffindor. I've gained my inheritance, and my magic has never felt this strong before. It's like

it's bubbling over."

"Yes, I've noticed." He actually shivers.

"I swear, I'll never hurt you with this power Severus!" I don't want him to be afraid of me. His legs squeeze shut tightly.

"I already know that." He's...

"You're aroused?!"

"Could you not shout it for the world to hear. And stop looking at me like I'm odd. It's completely normal for certain men to like their partner to be strong." I'll file that away for later. "Your magic is much stronger, but that doesn't mean that you know how to use it yet."

"You're right." He exhales.

"I think it's time to face the rest of the world. We've been hidden away for long enough."

"Are you sure Severus."

"I would like to see Draco. I'm sure my godson has a lot to tell me. And I would like to see my niece. My Princess."

"They've been wanting to see you too. Both of them." When I smile at him, he weakly smiles back. "If you would like, I can bring them here. That way it's not to much at once."

"Harry, I don't need to be coddled. I'm perfectly capable of facing the outside."

"I know Severus. I can't help it. I just want to protect you."

"Quite." He snickers.

"And I also know that your hips may be a bit sore from... you know."

"No. I'm in very little pain. You were very gentle." He was lovely

clinging to me. I think he may have opened up Pandora's box. He stands on shaky legs and I help steady him. He uses me as a crutch to support himself while he dresses in something a bit more presentable for the outside world. Messily he pulls his long hair back into a ponytail and then exhaling clinically, we both exit.

He's nearly tackled by Wendy.

"Wen Wen happy to see Sevy and Harhar okay!" She's smiling from ear to ear and any tension Severus had is gone. He's smiling back at her just as brightly.

"I just needed to rest for a bit. I'm feeling much better now." He assures her. I didn't expect this many people to be congregated in the common room. Almost everyone is here.

"I see you two are done sucking face." Ron says somewhat teasingly. I know he's just trying to lighten the mood. Hermione nudges him sharply.

"Mr. Weasley, what I do what my husband is hardly any of your business." Severus stands a bit straighter.

"Not like I care. Harry made up his mind about you and if my best friend loves you then I can accept your relationship. Honestly I like the idea of him being with you more than him doing anything with my sister."

"Ron!" Molly glares at her son.

"Well it's true." Lightly Severus is laughing beside me. Draco is curled up next to Neville unconscious.

"Dra just fell asleep. I'd really rather not wake him." Neville says smiling gently and wrapping his arm tighter around the silver haired boy next to him. "He hasn't been sleeping much lately so he's a bit tired." Why do I have the feeling that it's Neville that hasn't let him sleep. Draco certainly looks exhausted... but not dissatisfied.

Megan has been quiet the whole time. She stands and stalks over to us. She looks so much like her uncle when her face is serious. He actually takes a step back against me. Maybe he isn't ready for this

yet. Maybe it's still too much.

But she stops in front of him and looks up into his face.

Her arms latch around him in a tight embrace that he stays completely stationary for.

"Pri.... Megan."

"I'm so happy that you are okay. We have so much to talk about, but for right now please just let me hug you. I never thought I would get to again." His arms shake are he clutches her tightly to him.

Everyone watches as he shakily holds her.

"I've missed you so much!" If anyone notices him crying, no one says anything. "I thought I would never see you again. I thought I had lost you forever." I'm not sure who is trying to console who. But both are crying and clinging to the other just happy to finally have their family returned.

Chapter 63: Another interview

Severus is like liquid next to me. Any resistance he once felt seems to be nonexistent. It's different than the first time we sat on this couch. Everything was calculated to give the illusion that we were happy together.

His body limply presses against my side. His arms are crossed as if he were preparing for battle, but at the same time he is relaxed against me. The quill is floating next to the reporter. She's already begun asking questions and though most have been left up to me to answer, Severus's presence has been calming. I feel more stable with him next to me. I feel more secure in my choices.

I'm reminded that I have something to protect.

I'm asked every question imaginable about my battle with Voldemort. She expected a thrilling play by play and her eyes were more than a little confused when I said that there wasn't a battle.

"But he is dead?" She asks probingly.

"Yes. I killed him. The creation of Voldemort was due to the unfortunate circumstance that he was put in. He was once a misguided half blood that dangerously wanted to be accepted. He was talented and was proving to be a promising wizard. Unfortunately, someone corrupted him. I'm afraid that person is the real villain. And I'm afraid until that person is brought to trial for his crimes, this war will never end." Severus squeezes my hand comfortingly. "I have already mentioned my distrust of Albus Dumbledore. At the time, I knew that my reservations about the man were not unfounded, but I did not know the full extent that he contributed to this war. He parades as an honest honorable man, but really he is a master of deception."

"These are some very serious accusations. Certainly no man is perfect, but he has done a lot of good for the magical world."

"And he has done a lot of bad. Including sexual misconduct with underage students, conspiring and aiding the young Tom Riddle in opening up the chamber of secrets- which he would not have been able to do on his own. He stole Tom Riddle's magical inheritance that he obtained from being the heir of Slytherin. He took in a child that is no longer alive. That child was the heir of Hufflepuff. Dumbledore himself is the heir of Ravenclaw. And I am the heir of Gryffindor. Dumbledore has the magic of every founder except Godric Gryffindor. I don't know what his end plan is, but he is a villain living among us parading as a hero."

"Severus Snape, do you have anything to add." Her quill is writing as fast as it can. She's no longer interviewing us looking for gossip. It's like her eyes have changed. She's focused on every word that we are saying.

"My adoptive daughter was taken from me because Albus Dumbledore did not believe I was a fit guardian. Most of my life there has been a puppet master pulling the strings and I have always been easily manipulated by those that I trust. Perhaps it's why I make it a point to trust as few as possible. I came from a very abusive home and I wasn't accepted by my peers because I was different. I became a death eater because I felt it would be a place where I could belong. I didn't understand fully what I was agreeing to until it was already too late. By that point in my life I had already been violated sexually. Voldemort took an interest in me and because he was powerful and because no one had ever wanted me, I was flattered."

He pauses to gather his thoughts. Exhaling to calm himself he continues. His voice sounds restrained.

"I told Voldemort that I did not feel comfortable being in an intimate setting because of my past experiences. I know now that he had a very similar existence and maybe he was using me as an outlet. His partner hurt him as a way to show their warped affection and he did the same to me. I did come back to reality and realize that this wasn't an organization that I should be a part of. I became a spy for Dumbledore. He continued to send me into the pit of snakes because he knew I would be a valuable informant. Voldemort was in love with me. He was cruel and hurt me in more

ways than I can express, but he did love me. Albus Dumbledore knew that even if I was found out, I would never be killed. He exploited Voldemort's weakness."

I squeeze his hand and he smiles at me.

"The first war ended. My sister asked me to take in her child. My sister detested magic and since her daughter was gifted or perhaps cursed with magic, my sister did not want her own child. I will keep my adoptive daughter's identity anonymous because she is now happy with her own parents that love her very much, but I was once her sole guardian and Dumbledore took her from me. He fed off of my own fears of inadequacy as well as my love for my little princess. What parent that truly loves their child would refuse their baby a better life. A better life with two parents that will care for the child more than you ever could. I don't know how right or wrong he was. I wonder if his intentions for taking my daughter from me were just so I would have one less thing in this world that I love. One less thing that loves me."

He squeezes my hand tightly.

"Albus Dumbledore is not a good man. He has turned a blind eye to heinous acts, and I couldn't begin to mention everything today. I don't even know the full extent that he has done, but I know if the magical world continues to trust him, then the magical world will quickly return to a much bigger war."

"Thank you for comment." Her face is grave and I know she at least believes us. She gives us a weak smile. "Let us discuss lighter topics now. I had personally always believed that you did not like children. Can we expect any children in the foreseeable future."

"Severus and I have talked about it, and though we are divided on the subject of children, we do both agree that will not have any children until we are sure they can be brought up in a world that is not as full of turmoil." She nods. Severus and I have only talked about it briefly. I know that I certainly want children, but Severus is mixed on the topic. He isn't completely against having children, but I think he lacks trust in his own abilities. He's mostly kept quiet about what it was like raising Megan on his own, and he's stayed

tight lipped on all the things that Dumbledore brainwashed him about.

He didn't simply say 'hey you aren't a good parent I'm giving her to better ones.' I get the sense that this was a long process of constant beratement. I remember seeing Niffy smiling at Megan and then immediately patting Severus's head.

Yes, there was happiness. He was excited to see his Princess after so long, but it was more than that. The fear that I expected to disappear... didn't. When we went back to our room, he was shaky. He was anxious- more than before. Wen Wen came to check on us and was cooing softly at him. The things she said were enlightening. Phrases like 'You aren't a bad person.' 'You do deserve happiness.' 'She does want a relationship.' She smiles at him the entire time repeating these phrases like she was trying to counteract the past.

When we laid down, he curled against me. He was raw from emotion, so I didn't even try anything intimate. I just turned towards him and wrapped my arms protectively around him.

"Alright that's our story." She says upbeatedly. The quill falls into her hand marking the end of the interview. She puts down her papers and takes off her glasses. "This is off the record." She says in a much different tone. "Since the last time I interviewed you, I have done a lot of research on Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. I believe that he may be working with officials in the ministry because I've seen that there were many charges placed on him that were dropped and never brought into the public's eye. I have a brother in law- a real sweetie- that works at the ministry and he's able to sneak me some records. Granted we have to be careful because it is illegal for him to share some of the information with me that is not in public records. I never use the information for articles because that would put him in danger of losing his job, but it does point me in the right direction for stories a lot of times. I will do what I can to find more proof against him as well as ascertain the members of the ministry that are loyal to old dum dum." She smiles like a cat at us. "Off the record of course, but I'm a bit biased towards team Potter-Snape. Or would it we Snape-Potter?"

Severus is laughing lightly beside me. "I've never had anyone on my team before."

"I don't know how I can thank you for all this." I tell her relieved that we have at least one more on our side.

"Just keep giving me stories and when you two do eventually have kids- I demand that their picture appear in my article first before anyone elses."

Chapter 64: Sorry Severus

Some called us liars. Some believed that Severus had somehow corrupted me and used his potions to alter my perception of the world around me. Some remained loya lto Dumbledore, but some voices came forth. Not enough, but every person on our side is another step closer.

Severus is watching me closely to make sure that I do not go off on my own again. No, I've learned my lesson. I can't do this without him. I need him.

Our little army still mostly stays in our little safe house. I think we all know that this war isn't really over, but there is a bit of peace. We all know that Dumbledore does not want to draw attention to himself right now. He isn't going to be as obvious in his take over of the magical world as Voldemort was. He will move slow because he's crafty. He isn't going to make a rash decision that will put his ideals in danger.

That doesn't mean that we are safe. Who knows what that man is capable of. Who knows what that man will do now that we are publicly outing him for the evil that he is. More than that, who knows what those fiercely loyal to him will do in his name. Or what he may encourage them to do. I don't want to drag this war on any longer than necessary, but I also know that I can't be rash either.

Dumbledore has been taken into custody at the ministry of magic. Which is a fancy way of saying he's staying in a cushy room befitting his status while this 'slander' against him is squashed. He should be going to trial soon though. Rita lost a lot of her credibility in writing such a 'blatantly false' article. It was when we got an owl from her asking for protection that we invited her to our safe house. She apparently was getting death threats and although she's not someone I initially trusted, I do believe she cares more about the truth than the money. There was enough space in the- not as secret anymore- safe house for her.

I think Severus is starting to feel just a bit uncomfortable surrounded by so many people- friend or otherwise. At his core, he isn't an extravert. At his core he prefers smaller groups, and this is the exact opposite of that.

"We are going to have to get another safe house once this war is over. To many people know about this one."

"We?" I ask him.

"Well yeah. You, me, the elves, of course Princess and Draco... but if we bring Draco then he will insist that Neville come as well. I'm sure you will insist of Weasley and Granger, and naturally that means all of the Weasleys. Certainly Poppy cannot be left out either. She is the only medical professional that I trust." He's grimacing. "That isn't really cutting down on the amount of people that know about our future safe house though."

"I'm just glad to be included in that batch."

"It was so much simpler before you became involved in my life." The words are said with a playful edge to them and he's actually half smiling.

"Face it Snape, you're popular now." I say nudging him for good measure. He lets out a puff of air and rolls his eyes.

"Well Potter it was bound to happen with my winning personality and dashing good looks." His sarcastic tone gives me mixed feelings. On one hand, I'm glad to be around a playful Severus- it doesn't happen often, but on the other hand. I know that there is an edge of self-loathing in his words.

"I have to admit, you had all of us fooled for the longest time pretending to be a sour-faced mean man, but you just couldn't hide the real you forever." He opens his mouth to unleash no doubt a sarcastic retort, but instead he pauses as if he isn't sure how he wants to respond. "For the record, you might be hard to get to know, but you are a good caring person and I find you very attractive."

He crosses his arms defiantly. "I don't suppose you are trying to flatter me in order to worm your way back into my bed?" His eyes narrow at me accusingly.

"And if I were? I've been told it's completely acceptable to flirt with one's husband. I wouldn't say it though if I didn't mean it." His ears are pink. Merlin, I love him.

"You are certainly more open than you once were." He says awkwardly. I think he's still trying to find his place. He knows that I'm serious about us being together, but it's so foreign to him.

"I thought you would appreciate if I didn't leave anything to be misinterpreted. Yes Severus, I want very much to bugger you senseless." If his ears get any pinker, I don't think I'll be able to resist biting them. "I'm a man. I'm always going to want to have sex with my husband, but that doesn't mean I'm gong to jump your bones." If I thought he was comfortable with the idea of sex enough for me to be more aggressive then I would have already 'jumped his bones'. I think that day will come eventually, but I'm not going to rush it. I understand that he doesn't associate sex with love. I'm not going to perpetuate his fear. And if that day never comes, then I'll remain just as gentle as I can. "I do have some self-control."

"I'm a man too." He says crossing his arms tighter. Defensively.

"I know that." I said raising an eyebrow. Okay Harry, what did you do. How did you muck up the good mood this time?

"It isn't as though I don't want to engage in intimacy." If he weren't so damned adorable defiantly glaring at me, I might would be intimidated. "Just because I... am in the role where I receive does not make me less of a man than you." Now he's just putting words in my mouth.

"Severus, I know that! Why are you being so difficult right now?"

"I don't know!" He says throwing his hands up in frustration. "I know you think highly of me. I know you don't think you are better than me." He's now pacing. "I know that just because I was worthless and had to be rescued that you don't think I'm worthless,

and I know that just because we are technically married and I've been to terrified to let you touch me so many times doesn't mean that you think I'm less of a man. I know that." He's only pacing faster and no longer looking at me. "My niece wants a relationship with me, I'm married to a man that treats me better than I deserve, the man that has been.... He's gone. I'm no longer under Dumbledore's thumb. For the first time in my life everything is going well and I can't help but wonder how long until whatever curse is on me rises up again and takes away all of my happiness."

"Nothing like that is going to happen."

"You don't know that."

"I'm not going to let anything happen. Severus, we are stuck together for better or worse. As long as you will let me, I will do everything in my power for us to be happy. I'll do everything in my power to make you smile... you really don't smile enough. If I could, I would make it where you were always smiling." I sound like a dufus. "And if there is anything I can do to make something easier, then I will. I never really wanted to, but if you would feel more comfortable topping or having us switch sometimes, then for you I would. I know we've mostly carried on like this because that's how it started, but I don't need to be protected, and I know you wouldn't hurt me if we switched roles."

He blinks at me several times as if not fully understanding what I'm saying.

"Harry, I don't need you to do that just because you are worried about me."

"That's not why I said that. Severus, I just want to be with you. That's it. There is not any ulterior motives. There is not any judgment. I just want to be with you. However that can happen. If you feel like less of a man being held or your pride can't take it, then fine. I don't have that kind of pride. I'm more than happy to be held by you. I just want to be with you."

"Well. We are already together." He says gently. I smile at him.

"At least that's one good thing Dumbledore did." I'm almost thankful for the man.

"Harry."

"Yes?" He's eerily serious.

"I don't want you to be the one to kill Dumbledore. If he has to die, then I need to be the one to kill him."

"Severus." He stops me with his emotionless stare.

"You had to kill Voldemort. He was too corrupted and with him alive the world could never be at peace. You should have never had to do such a thing. Your soul is to pure to be corrupted by something like taking another's life. I don't want you to do something like that again. If it comes down to killing Dumbledore then my soul is already corrupted and grey. One more life will not make a difference, but I don't want you to become a killer for this world."

"Severus, we are going to do this together... whatever that ends up entailing. I don't want you to have to have that burden either."

"I guess we will figure out what we will have to do when the time comes. For right now, we will wait to see how his trial goes." I really hope this battle is won in the courtroom and not on the battle field. But there is something I haven't told Severus yet. I gave my word to Tom that I would make sure that Dumbledore dies. I'm not going to go back on my word. Dumbledore will have to be killed nothing less than that will end this war.

I'm sorry Severus.

Chapter 65: The trial

The courtroom couldn't seat everyone that wanted to attend. Some loyal to Severus and myself. Some loyal to Dumbledore. Some just loyal to the truth and whatever that may be. Albus Dumbledore for his part looks every bit an innocent man handed up to the hounds. He is calm and articulate in his words as if it's only a matter of time until he is proven innocent. He could fool me with this act.

"I am not saying that young Harry is necessarily wrong. I'm sure he believes he is doing what is best for the magical world. As someone who has spent years protecting all that I can, I do understand. I'm sure he believes that he is correct in the judgement of my character." His tone is very even while also sounding human. Everything he says- I can tell it was carefully planned to reach the most people he could. "But It still saddens me that he would believe such lies about me. I have always thought very highly of young Harry, and I have always seen Severus as a son."

"Then why did you send him directly into the path of danger?" Severus grabs my arm silently reminding me that I'm also being watched.

"It was war. Don't forget, there was a time Severus played his part against the light. It only made sense to use that blunder to our advantage. I hated knowing that he was in such an awful situation, but for the greater good- for the lives of you and all the other innocent, Severus and I both agreed that it made sense for him to be a spy."

"Harry." Severus says under his breath where only I can hear him. "Calm yourself. He knows that I am a sensitive topic for you, do not let your love for me be your undoing." His lips pull into a barely visible smile. Under the table, he holds my hand and it helps me focus.

Severus is my weakness. Dumbledore knows that, and he isn't above exploiting it. We knew that when we were preparing for this trial.

Dumbledore could never win if he were targeting me. I'm the boy who lived and the boy who killed Voldemort and 'put a stop to this war'. I'm well loved by most of the magical world. His only hope is to prove that I am somehow mistaken. Prove that I was deceived or potentially brainwashed.

Severus on the other hand is not well loved. In fact, he's very much the opposite. Sure, we've taken great lengths to improve his reputation, but most outside of our small circle still see him as a cruel bitter ex-death eater. And now also the man who took 'the boy who lived' off the market. Some view him as the man I was forced to bond with, and they see him as the enemy.

"This case is more than just about what you have done to Severus, there have been many records of you using your reputation to deceive others. The case of the Hufflepuff boy that you adopted and his early death. I am also accusing you of creating Voldemort." The room looks uncomfortable at the name being said aloud.

"Harry, these claims are ridiculous and mostly only fragilely held up by grief-stricken witnesses. Many of which are not trustworthy enough for their statements to hold up in this court. Why should anyone believe You-Know-Who's accusations against me?" He's calm under pressure. If he believes he is innocent, then he can convince everyone else. "As for Gregory, he was the son of two very close personal friends. When they did the unthinkable and took their own lives, I naturally gave Gregory a home. But as I'm sure you can understand, losing parents at such a young age greatly warped his fragile mind. I blame myself for not seeing the signs, and I've questioned many times if there was anything I could have done to save him from his own undoing."

"I'm not convinced." I lead. "I am the heir to Gryffindor. Tom Riddle was the heir to Slytherin. I saw for myself how little magical power he possessed. Because his magical inheritance was stolen from him." There are suspicious looks between me and Dumbledore. "I do not claim that Tom Riddle is or was a saint. He was a flawed corrupted man, and the world is safer without him, but someone had to create that corruption. You manipulated a young man who only wanted love and acceptance. You used and toyed with him and eventually took all you wanted and discarded him."

"Harry my boy." His eyes look hurt. He looks betrayed. He looks innocent. "I would never do such a thing to anyone."

"But you did. You had sex with him. You made him trust you. You may have even made him love you, and then you tricked him into opening the chamber of secrets- knowing that he would not be able to control the serpent inside. Once he opened the chamber, he gained his magical inheritance and then you took it from him."

"Preposterous." He shakes his head as if dispelling the lies.

"You are the heir of Ravenclaw and you have been plotting for decades to gain the magical inheritance from all the heirs. The only thing I don't know, is why!" Severus's hand is the only thing I can feel. His hand and blinding rage. "I trusted you! I trusted you because you were my headmaster. I trusted you even though you left me to be raised by relatives that hated me. You left me in a home where I was molested and starved and beaten. DAILY! You cannot take the high ground with me. You have worn the façade of a kind hearted man all while turning a blind eye to abuse because it did not suit your selfish cause. You make the excuse that because Severus made a mistake when he was young that you had every right exploiting it, but you don't mention that you are the one who caused him to make that mistake. You left him in a home where he was raped and treated as if he were not worthy to exist. You allowed the rift between houses to grow and you even encouraged it. My father and his friends tortured him. One of which sent him to be killed by a werewolf student that should not have even been at the school. You covered it up. And you silenced him. You allowed one of his teachers to sexually assault him. You forced him to become a deatheater."

"Harry." Severus softly calls my name. But it doesn't calm me down.

"I trusted you. The magical world trusted you. You convinced everyone that our enemy was Voldemort, but you failed to mention you created Voldemort. I hate that you made me on the same side as the man who killed my parents, but of the two of you he truly was the lesser of two evils." I take my seat and actually listen to the uproar in this room. Escalating arguing rings in my ears. It's a fury of words and I cannot pick out one from another. I feel cold as the

judges' reign in the mounting agitation. Witnesses are called. Testimonies are given.

Mothers who's once magical children are now squibs. Past students mentioning their lives of abuse. The words against his character pile up and those loyal to him are beginning to question themselves. Just a cursory look around the room is enough to see the looks of suspicion. He's losing ground.

"Order." A judge says. "Albus Dumbledore, for your crimes you have been sentenced to life in Azkaban." It's over.

"Please reconsider. I have always been loyal to the wellbeing of the magical world." My skin feels like it's tingling.

"The verdict is final. Aurors please escort Albus Dumbledore to his cell." Something's not right.

SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT!

My skin is tingling. My magic is buzzing agitatedly. For a brief moment, I see Dumbledore as he really is. Cold detached eyes. A furious snarl.

I move on instinct before I even hear the words.

"Avada Kedavra!"

Pain

"Harry!" I'm still protectively wrapped around him. The courtroom is in a panic. But I can't focus on that now. "We need a medic now!" I've never heard his voice quite so panicked before. I'm sorry that I had to worry you so much. You've always protected me though. I'm glad I was able to protect you this time.

Everything feels cold. Words are sounding muddy.

Blurrily I look up at my husband. His eyes have never looked so expressive as they do now dripping tears down on my face.

He's mouthing words, but I just can't tell what he's saying. I'm sorry

Severus. I'm just so tired.

I'll apologize after a nap.

Chapter 66: A king for a pawn

It hurts to breathe. Breathing almost feels suffocating. Like it would hurt less if I just stopped. If I just stopped fighting for a moment the pain would stop.

So why do I not want the pain to stop.

I feel both freezing and hot at the same time. I'm scared, but I'm calm. I don't know if I'm alive or not. Why am I not scared. Why am I so sure that everything will be okay.

"How the fuck did he escape!" That vengeful voice could cut through even the deepest of sleep. Looks like my husband is angry. Not at me I hope. I'm so tired. I should open my eyes and tell Severus that I'm alright. But this half sleep feels so peaceful.

"Sevy." And that's Wendy's voice. "Har Har is sleeping. Inside voice." She says chastising him lightly.

"Perhaps we should talk in the other room." I think that's Poppy, but I'm not really sure. I feel a larger hand squeeze over mine.

"I'm not leaving his side." His voice is threatening.

"The aurors are looking everywhere for him Severus. They will find him. Harry is stable. You are both safe, now you need to rest." Definitely Poppy.

"I will not rest until that man is dead. Not captured. Not awaiting a worse sentence. Dead!" I really don't want to wake up. The pain is agonizing. How am I even alive.

"Bad Sevy! You woke Har Har." Wendy sounds accusing. I feel much weaker when I open my eyes. I'm dressed in night clothes.

"Don't move to much. How are you feeling? Are you hurting anywhere?"

"Severus, give him a chance to answer." Poppy pats his arm. "You gave us all a scare Harry."

"How am I alive? He used the killing curse. How am I alive."

"I saved you." Severus says slowly. "Well. My wand saved you. It acted on it's own accord. For once I'm actually not upset with it."

"You both instinctively protected each other." Poppy explains. "You shielded him and his wand protected you. Unfortunately, you weren't the only one hit. I knew that Albus Dumbledore was... flawed, but I certainly didn't expect him to do this. He killed four wizards three were aurors, and he escaped. No one knows where he could be."

"Why didn't the aurors take his wand from him. That should have been the first thing taken." It's painful, but I force myself to sit up. Silently, Severus helps me.

"Harry, they did take his wand." Poppy says slowly. "He was casting the killing curse wandlessly." She gives me a tight forced smile. "Severus did not trust St Mungo's, or the medical wing at Hogwarts. Understandably so, we apparated you to the safe house and you've been in a healing coma for three days. Considering the potential that you could have died, three days of rest isn't too high a price to pay."

"We have to find him before he can do more harm." I say. He was aiming for Severus. Why Severus. Why wasn't he aiming to kill me. It doesn't make sense.

"You aren't going anywhere." Severus says in his familiar way. He's acting different. He's acting how he use to when he was my teacher and not my husband.

"Severus, I have to do something."

"You aren't going anywhere Harry. You are still hurt. The aurors will find him, and you will stay here to rest."

"You both will." Poppy says. "Harry. The thickheaded snake will only listen to you. He hasn't slept since you were attacked. It's been

three days. Please work that power you have over him to get him to settle down." The shadows under his eyes do look darker. His hair hasn't been washed either. He probably hasn't left my side all this time. Sleep does sound good. I'm still so tired.

"We still have to stop him, but we are useless if we are falling asleep. Severus, please don't fight me on this. She's right. We both need rest." I grab his arm and try to encourage him to slide into the bed, but it's like I have no strength in my body. Grabbing him is the most I can do right now. When he doesn't move, I smile as cheeringly as I can. "Severus, humor me. I'd feel much better if my husband is next to me. It's Doctors orders that I need to rest more, and I'm not going to unless you agree to sleep as well." He exhales agitatedly. He's not upset with me or even Poppy. Just the situation.

It feels nice wrapping my arms around him.

"Good night Sevy. Good night Har Har. Wen Wen will protect." She pats the top of my head and then the top of Severus's. Softly I hear them both leave the room.

Wrapped around my husband, I feel surprisingly safe.

"Don't ever do something like that again." His voice breaks through the quiet.

"If I didn't, you would have died."

"Harry. This world doesn't need me, but it does need you. Your life is far more important than mine. You do not sacrifice a king for a pawn."

"Severus." I think this is the first time I'm the small one being comforted. It feels good to lay on his chest. It feels good to be held. "Without my queen, I have no desire to be king."

"Harry. If the king dies, then so does the queen. If you die in the process of saving me, then you have accomplished nothing because I won't live long after."

"And you think I would? Severus, I don't want to bicker right now. Lets just agree that neither of us will die? You protect me with your

life and I'll protect you with mine. We will live together or die together."

"Harry."

"I'm sorry for worrying you Severus, but I couldn't take the chance of losing you. I wasn't thinking clearly. It's like Poppy said. I was moving on instincts. But if I did have time to think, I would have still done the same thing. And I'll do it again. And again. Forever. You messed up Sevy, you made me fall in love with you. No backsies." His wonderful warm laugh melts me.

"Sappy fool."

"What can I say, you bring out the worst in me."

"And you bring out the worst in me."

"You are so lucky I have no energy or I'd have to bugger you senseless." He scoffs.

"For now, you'll have to settle for a kiss." I feel his lips press to the top of my head and I have to say I'm pleased with myself. My body feels like lead, and the pain hasn't let up. But we are both alive. We are both safe.

Dumbledore is still out there. Who knows when he will strike again. Who knows what his next plan is. If he can wandlessly cast an unforgiveable, then he's a much bigger danger than I thought. Next time I may not be able to save Severus in time. Next time I may actually die. I could try to stop Dumbledore on my own, but last time I acted on my own Severus got hurt saving me. We are up against someone much more dangerous than Voldemort. I can't recklessly charge in.

Beside me Severus is lightly snoring. If I move at all he only grips me tighter- not that I mind. I can't act alone. I can't do that to Severus, but I really don't want to put him in more danger. For now, we do both need rest. I have a lot of questions, but right now I just don't have the energy.

You failed Dumbledore. You tried to take my husband from me, but

you didn't. You outed yourself as the evil you are now all of the magical world knows not to trust you. We will find you and then this blasted war can finally end.

Chapter 67: Your his life

Severus has basically been a mother bear since Dumbledore attacked me. He's been needlessly protective and uncompromising. In some ways he's the same he's always been with me except this time, I know it's from a position of caring. There is definitely still pain, but being able to walk away from this is worth the pain.

The aurors haven't found Dumbledore. They haven't even found a trace of him. It's like he disappeared. He was able to use the killing curse wandlessly. Even without a wand he is fully able to kill. I've been trying to use my own magic wandlessly, but I'm obviously not as skilled as Dumbledore at controlling my magic yet.

The biggest change is, the magical world believes I'm dead. Sure, there are a handful that know that I survived, but the general public believes I was killed. I wanted to rush out immediately and put the magical world at ease, but Severus and Poppy insisted that this remain a secret. There will come a time for me to show the world I am still alive, but for now it's better that less people know.

Hopefully it will give us an edge to defeat Dumbledore.

I'm not going to lie though. I'm scared. More so than I was of Voldemort. At least everyone knew where Voldemort stood. They knew his goals and his ambition, but Dumbledore is different. No one knows what his end goal is and frankly that's terrifying.

"You need to eat more." It's strange to hear those words from Severus. He's holding the spoon to my mouth. It looks like some sort of jelly. The lines on his face are deeper and his eyes are tired.

"Severus, I can feed myself." He smiles gently at me.

"Humor me then." He's equal parts harsh and gentle. The safe house is once again full of our army. Only those that we trust are here to see us lick our wounds. Sometimes Severus even lets me leave the bed. I've been sentenced to bedrest but even Poppy said that as long

as I take it easy and rest, I can meander the common area and talk. I just cannot get to excited or active.

Meaning no sex. Not that that was the first thing on my mind, but it's funny how desperately carnal cravings take over when you've had a near death experience. So my days are filled with idle chatter, chess, and rest. I want to storm out and face Dumbledore, but we all know I'm not physically able to do much. Merlin, Severus still has to help me dress and bathe.

"Give him some space." Draco says leaning against Neville. "He's alright now. He's resting. Honestly you are stressing yourself out." The tone is slightly playful, but it only makes Severus scowl. Draco is the only one other than myself that is so comfortable with Severus that he isn't hesitant to voice concerns. "He's resting. He's safe. Now sit down and take care of yourself. Stop taking all of this on yourself." Draco folds comfortably into Neville.

"We are concerned about you Uncle. Stressing yourself will not help the situation." Megan says sweetly. Never easily swayed, Severus stands just as stubbornly.

"We are going to find Dumbledore and put an end to whatever his plan is." I say grabbing Severus's arm. "I'm okay." His stoic eyes hide away all of the fear I know he's feeling. He rarely possesses anything that gives him happiness or joy and every time it's been taken from him; so, I understand his determination to not rest until Dumbledore is stopped. It's easy to mistake his stoic eyes for anger or cruelty, but I know that isn't the case. "We will plan- like we have before- and then we will strike when the time is right. He acted rashly, and he's outed himself for the person he really is. We also have the advantage of him believing that I'm dead. He will not expect me." Severus breathes in deeply before settling next to me.

Limply he lays his head on my shoulder and just closes his eyes. It's such a vulnerable action and for him to do it in front of so many people just shows how comfortable he is with our loyal friends. The sets of eyes watching him relax into me actually make my cheeks feel warm. I know that Severus loves me, but to have him display it so openly is something I would have never expected.

Draco smirks but says nothing and Neville just smiles comfortably. I'm still scared about the inevitable fight, but this is the happiest I've ever been in my life. Severus ends the action just as fluidly as he entered it. He stands elegantly and turns to his niece.

"Megan, you are the only one here who has any talent with potions, would you mind helping me. I have quite the volume to brew." Megan's eyes sparkle at being asked to help. No one is offended at Severus's words and newly raised shields. This is just how he is. "Neville, I need some herbs and other ingredients."

"I would be happy to get them for you." Neville says before Severus has the chance to finish. He grabs Draco's hand. They have been inseparable.

"And Wen Wen will watch Har har." Wendy shouts excitedly. Her hands go to her hips and her eyes squint at me in what I can only assume to be her 'serious face'. Severus kisses the top of my head and everyone leaves to do their tasks. I actually feel a bit useless and left out. Wendy though crawls onto the couch and smiles wide. "Wen Wen has missed Har har. Har har has been busy. So has Sevy." A twinge of guilt spreads over me, but she doesn't look unhappy. She actually seems content.

"I'm sorry." I still say. She shakes her head.

"All any house elf wants is to please their master." She looks sad for a moment. "Sevy was not happy. Sevy was not pleased. Sevy was alone and not wanted. Sevy was very very sad." Her voice is shaking, but then her voice becomes clear again and she has a bright smile splitting her face. "Now Sevy is happy. Sevy saved Wen Wen but Wen Wen couldn't make Sevy happy. Sevy gave Wen Wen purpose, but Wen Wen couldn't give Sevy purpose. Sevy gave Wen Wen a home, but Wen Wen couldn't give Sevy a home. Sevy gave Wen Wen a family..... I couldn't give him one." She's crying but the smile doesn't waver. "Sevy made me happy, but I could not make him happy."

"Wendy." She's always been mature for her age, but this...

"but you did." She lays her head onto her knees. There is still an

element of childishness that she's had since I first met her, but she certainly seems older. "Sevy would cry if you died. Sevy is much softer than people think. So. Please. For Sevy and because I am asking you. Please don't try to fight Dumbles on your own. I don't think Sevy could take it if you got hurt and he wasn't there."

"Wendy, I don't want him to get hurt either. He deserves to be happy, he deserves for the rest of his life to be in peace. I can't take the chance of him getting hurt."

"If you die, Sevy will make sure to kill Dumbles..." She looks at her feet. "But then Sevy would kill himself. He has nightmares. When you were asleep, he tried to stay awake, but when he would drift off, nightmares would startle Sevy awake. He would cry because you had died. And he couldn't save you." She smiles at me. "You are Sevy's life. You dying is no different from him dying."

"You are a very smart little girl aren't you." She shakes her head.

"No. Wen Wen just loves her masters."

Chapter 68: Leave a message after the beep

It's been torture. I want nothing more than to pin Severus down and bugger him senseless. I'm so horny I can't stand it. If I could at least jerk off then maybe I wouldn't feel so pent up, but I am never left alone. It's been so long and I'm borderline about to lose control.

"Severus. Let's fool around." How could anyone resist something as eloquently said as that. He lifts one eyebrow as if he's not sure that he heard me correctly. Merlin. We are basically married and I've not had him in ages. Why is this so difficult to ask for. "I'm really horny." He blinks at me gob smacked. He's standing in the middle of our room. He was in the process of finding some bed clothes for me and then he was going to put his night shirt on.

"Harry. You are in no condition to be... exerting yourself." Damn it. And Merlin his ears are so pink. I bet they would be so warm in my mouth...

"Severus, I'm fine. Fine enough at least." It still hurts to move to much. "I'm sure a bit of intimacy would make me feel better."

"No. You don't need to be moving around to much until you are healed more."

"Then what if we just sucked each other off. I wouldn't have to move much for that." He opens his mouth to disagree, but he really doesn't have an argument. "Severus, I'm pent up and needy. I've been next to my husband who is finally showing me some love and I just want to feel good with you." I know he's still nervous about intimacy. He also doesn't have the highest self-esteem.

"Okay." He whispers slowly.

"Severus." He doesn't look at me. His face is pink but I would never tell him that. "You can say no."

"I know that." He continues to whisper. "It's not like I don't want this."

"Then come here." He hesitates for a minute before going to turn off the lights. I would have preferred them on, but if he's more comfortable like this, then fine. I hear the sounds of him removing clothes. I wonder if he's already hard. I know I am. I shuffle out of my own clothes while remaining in bed. I'm so excited that my breathing is already labored, but I force it to even out. I don't want him to misunderstand and think I'm not well enough for this.

The bed dips and my dick throbs in anticipation. A hesitant hand lays on my stomach. It is a nice cool temperature. "I'm not sure how you want to do this." Gently I take his hand and guide his body overtop mine. He swings one of his legs to the other side of my head. It's too dark to see clearly, but I can feel puffs of his warm breath ghosting over my erection. While he steadies himself, I slowly lick him from base to tip.

"Oh Merlin." He groans. I never knew I would want to suck another man off so desperately. While he's still trying to work up the nerve to start, I take him into my mouth and suck greedily. Hearing him whimper only encourages me to suck him deeper into my mouth. Sweet means and pleas encourage. He eventually silences himself. His hot mouth is searing. There is an edge of nervousness, but the desire is also fully there. Hesitance and nervousness is edging away and being replaced with mutual pleasure.

It's an awkward position, but I reach to tangle my hand in his silky hair. The minimal pressure encourages him to take me deeper until I feel like I'm hitting the back of his throat. "Severus." My voice doesn't sound like my own. "That feels so good." I want more of him. I want to taste more of him. "Keep going Severus." It's still difficult to see, but I can see enough. His erection is hanging proudly just over my face and his pale ass is in the air as he concentrates on sucking me off. When my hands go to squeeze his round cheeks he pauses for a moment as if caught off guard, but then continues. "You turn me on so much." I want to taste him. It feels good to squeeze those globes in my hands. He doesn't seemed bothered but when I spread his cheeks and press my tongue inside of him he completely tenses.

"Harry. That's unsanitary." The nerves are back. The anxiety is back. Everything is clearly expressed in his voice.

"Shh. Just keep going." My hand tangles in his dark hair again and gently pushes his head back down. When I press my tongue in again he whines beautifully around me. I don't think he's realized that his hole is twitching expectantly. He wants this so badly. As I thrust into the warm cavern of his mouth, I suck and lick his entrance until he's limply whimpering while sucking me off. "You turn me on so much. I love you." He pulls away panting. His precum is dripping onto my chest and has been for a while. "Severus, I want to be inside you."

"No." He's panting. "You... need to not exert yourself. That's why we were doing it this way." I squeeze his bottom again and suck his twitching hole. A desperate moan is pulled from his pale lips.

"Then ride me. I need you Severus." His legs seem unsteady as he wordlessly crawls down my body. I can only see the tension I his back. "Face me Severus. I want to watch my husband riding me."

"Harry, I'm not use to taking the lead." My sweet husband

"It's just us Severus. Anything you do will be perfect. I just want you." His movement is almost robotic as he straddles my lap. His hand squeezes my erection and lines himself up. He's more than prepared for me. His hand presses into my abdomen as he slowly eases down. It's been much to long. He's so tight. He's so hot around me. Muted whimpers. Merlin he's so sexy. My eyes have somewhat adjusted to the lack of light and I can see his outline clearly. I can see his dark eyes clinched tightly shut. I can see his pale nipples hard from excitement. I can see his erection laying against my abdomen leaking pre all over it. I can see the tension in his legs as he lifts himself and then lowers himself again. He's nervous.

When my hands go to his hips it seems to calm him down instead of making him more nervous which is good. I encourage him to rock on me with light pushing and pulling and he wordlessly understands. I'm so deep inside him. I need more. I had good intentions to not exert myself, but Merlin I can't resist him.

With quick movement, I pull him down where his chest is pressed to mine. This seems to touch a good spot inside of him because he moans loudly and open mouthed. More. I need more. I roll him where he's under me and do what I really wanted. Roughly and deeply I slam into him. Long fingers dig into my back.

"Is this okay?" I have enough control to ask this much. I want to be gentle with him, but I need to fuck him as hard and deep as I can.

"M.. More!" His plea is desperate and sultry and entirely to much for someone as pent up as I am... was.

I can't stave off my orgasm. I can't stop my hips from spasming into his and cumming as deep into him as I possibly can. I can't stop the spew of profanities and humiliating confessions spilling from my mouth.

"Love you. Turn me on so much. Want you. So fucking good. I want to fuck you into the bed. I want to fuck you raw and hard and ohhh love you. I want to impregnate you. Fu... So tight and good. Fuck. I love you. I love you. I love you!" The moment I come down from my euphoric high, I notice the intense silence. My dick is softening having accomplished what it set out to do. I really wanted him to cum first. And I said so many...

His light chuckle is actually what breaks the silence. I don't know how I feel about that. On one hand it's always great to hear him laughing on the other... I feel pretty silly. "I didn't mean to finish so quickly. I guess maybe I should have controlled myself better." He's still laughing lightly. His face is pressed into my check so I can't really see. "Can I... I mean. I want to finish you off. I'm still pretty inexperienced with this. I didn't mean to lose control like that."

"At least you have an excuse to be hormone crazed. I should have outgrown this by now." If not for the laughing It would sound self depreciating. "There is no need to 'finish' me off."

"Yes there is! There's no point if you don't feel good too." He just laughs louder and it's then that I feel a cooling sensation on my stomach. He...

"It would seem that my traitor of a body is quite attuned to your words. Isn't it ridiculous." The uncontrollable laugher seems out of place on his normally serious features. "What does it say about me that I came when you said you loved me. Could I be more pathetic!" He's shaking his head trying to reign in the fit of laughter.

"I'm just glad I didn't finish alone that would have been uncool." He seems to be getting himself under control and only a few laughs break few occasionally.

"Actually. I came twice. The first time when you... were preoccupied licking me there. You seemed entirely to into it. I can't believe you didn't notice."

"I just wanted you to feel good."

"Apparently, you also want to impregnate me?" I don't need to see to know that he's raising an eyebrow.

"Wow would you look at the time, we really should be resting. After all I wouldn't want to exert myself. Anyways. I love you Severus good night." I kiss him quickly on the cheek and roll over.

"Don't think this conversation is over." His tone is unreadable and right now I really don't want to think about what he may be feeling about my um... declaration.

"Sorry Harry isn't home right now, leave a message after the beep."

Chapter 69: Severus is not housebroken

Everyday I'm stronger, and not just physically. I can feel my magical inheritance getting stronger. The feel is much more intoxicating than it was when my powers first unlocked. I feel like this power could corrupt anyone if they allowed themselves. It's too much for one vessel.

Dumbledore has the inheritance from three of the four founders. If he is feeling three times what I am feeling then it's no wonder he became so... corrupt. There is something about this immense power that makes you both feel unstoppable and insignificant. With this power no one could stand in my way, and yet... there is something hollow about it.

I have no doubt that Dumbledore has a goal. He is not a stupid man. He has a goal. A mission. I don't know what that could be, and honestly, I'm afraid to know. It was always strange to me that a man known to be the greatest wizard of our time 'lowered' himself to be nothing more than a headmaster. It was peculiar

I convinced myself when I was a student that no doubt it was because this honorable man saw molding the minds of children to be a great service.

"You are deep in thought." Severus says to me effectively breaking my concentration.

"No, I wasn't." He shakes his head.

"You've always bitten your bottom lip when you are deep in thought. I noticed it your first year. Every test. Every question you were given. You would always bite your bottom lip. So, you are deep in thought. But what could be filling the mind of such an empty-headed boy." The tone is teasing and it actually puts me at ease.

"I just don't know what his plan could be. And I don't know how I can possibly stop him." Severus sits on the edge of the bed next to me.

"I'm not above running away like a coward. Let's take those we care about, change our names, and go into hiding. Let others clean up this mess and let us actually have a bit of peace and happiness."

"You know we can't."

"Of course we can. You've done your part. You took down the dark lord, why should you have to take down another. Why should you have to save the world *again.*"

"Because I'm the only one that can stop him. And I will either succeed or his plan will come to fruition." I say snippier than I intended.

"And how exactly do you plan to defeat a man that has more than triple the experience you have?" His voice is more than antagonistic.

"The same way I defeated the troll my first year, and the snake in the chamber of secrets, and Voldemort, and all the other things I've done. With sheer dumb luck. I've come this far. I think that's pretty good for a boy who spent his first eleven years in a cupboard. And if you don't think I can, well you better think again. I've blasted you across the room in the shrieking shack, and survived against dragons and dementors. Imposters and mazes. And a psycho woman obsessed with cats making me write lines into my own skin. I can handle an old man like Dumbledore just fine." I say raising my voice.

Severus leans forward and lightly kisses me on the lips. He almost never initiates kissing. When he pulls back he has an easy smirk on his face. "There you are. I was afraid for a minute that I was sleeping with an imposter. Doubt doesn't suit you. Over confidence is much more becoming on you. It'll be dangerous. But I believe this is worth fighting for." I squint my eyes at him in suspicion.

"You were egging me on on purpose."

"I've spent enough time with you to know how to get under your skin. Don't think you've house trained me just yet." He yawns. "I've put Ms Granger on researching Dumbledore. She was able to get to personal records in the ministry of magic- I think you and that Weasley boy were a bad influence on her- She was able to sneak in much to easily for my liking She is researching estates he may have and doing her part for this upcoming war."

"If anyone can find a lead, it's 'mione. No one can research like her."

Severus exhales and lays back on the bed. In a strange show of affection, he pulls me against him on his chest. Normally our roles are reversed. "Severus?" I ask.

"If you keep overworking your brain, then it will melt from the strain of unfamiliar activity." The tone is reminiscent of cruel comments he use to say, but there is a playful tone to his voice now. "I know you are under a lot of stress. I know you are desperate to protect me and our small group. I know you are scared. I know you are much to young to be under this level of expectations. I know that you think you have to carry the weight of everything on your shoulders. I know I'm not the... 'man' in this relationship and I am often the one being coddled by you. But Harry. You *can* rely on me. You can lean on me. You can trust that I can be strong for you too. I know you have been having nightmares, and you have been pretending like you haven't. We share a bed. You normally don't move in your sleep, but you have been recently. I do notice these things, but it bothers me that you haven't confided in me how anxious I know you are."

"It's just not something I'm use to talking about. There was never anyone that I could lean on. I know you understand that."

"But that isn't the case anymore." He says gently. "Not for either of us. I'm doing my part Harry. I'm opening up to you even though it's not what I'm use to or what I'm comfortable doing. Now, I expect you to do the same."

"I'll try." It's really all I can muster right now. His arm lays over me and I know he has no intention of letting me go. I have been having nightmares lately, but when I wake up, all of them are fuzzy and I

can't remember anything. All I have to show of it is a throbbing headache. His fingers pet my hair affectionately. He doesn't respond. And I don't volunteer anymore words.

The feel of his fingers lull me into a state of peace. The sheer number of nightmares has made my sleeping restless. I've been so tired and trying to act as though I wasn't. The feel of his fingers lull me into a state of comfort. Right now, I am the small one. Right now, I am the one folded against him. Right now, I am the one being coddled and protected. Right now, I am the one that is safe and being watched over.

It is a foreign feeling. Severus on all accounts is a very intimidating man. It's easy to feel safe when he is guarding you. At first I wondered silently why it felt so familiar and yet so foreign.

He has always been protecting me. Mostly in the shadows. With a cruel expression and emotionless eyes, he protect me completely. I was always in danger. But I always had someone protecting me and watching over me.

I never succeed because of sheer dumb luck.

I succeeded because I was never fighting alone.

I succeeded because there was always my queen ready to swoop in and save me from the enemy pawns.

I can feel myself floating. A voice that I shouldn't know is mouthing words into my ear like whispers.

I cannot understand a single word.

'What?' I ask the voice. I cannot see anything over than a voice of shifting white and black. The voice calls out more insistently, but still I cannot hear. 'I can't hear you. I don't know what you are trying to say.'

A scream of pain splits through the silence and I have to cover my ears to keep from crying out in mirrored pain.

'I don't know what you are trying to tell me.' I cry out. And real tears are pouring from my eyes. Dread and emptiness seeps into my core.

'Ravenclaw Mannor.'

Chapter 70: The Founders

Lightly a hand shakes me and I can feel myself waking up.

"Harry." The hand shakes me more insistently. "Harry, wake up."

"Ravenclaw manner." Severus's eyes are squinted in confusion. "Severus, their were voices. And I couldn't hear it all and I don't really understand, but Ravenclaw manner. That's all I heard." His mouth opens then closes.

"Harry, there isn't a Ravenclaw manner." He presses his hand to his mouth. "The founders mostly resided at the school that they created together. I don't believe there is a Ravenclaw manner at least, but I suppose I wouldn't call myself an expert."

"What do you know about the founders." I need to know and I don't know how to verbally express that need. "What do you know about the founders." ask again.

"Well." He sits next to me and looks up trying to gather his thoughts. "It all really depends on what research one does. There are countless contradictions. The few things that all resources agree on are that, there were four friends. Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Salazar Slytherin, and Rowena Ravenclaw. The four of them were very close and gave some of their immense magic to build Hogwarts. Each of them placed some of their magic inside the sorting hat so that future students could belong to the house that best suited them. That's where the agreements dropped off." He bites his thumb. "The rest changes depending on whom you ask, and everyone believes a bit differently.

"What do you believe?" He crosses his arms.

"The dark lord was the heir to Slytherin. When he unlocked the chamber of secrets, he was able to access all of Salazar Slytherin's journals. Many were educational. Potions. Dark magic. Rare ingredients and where to find them. Among those were personal

ones. Only the heir of Slytherin could ever have access to his most personal thoughts. The dark lord allowed me to read these ancient writings I believe as a way to show his care for me. I don't believe he knew about the personal writings. He did not have much desire or need for his ancestor's knowledge." He's silent for many minutes. "I do not know if I completely believe what Salazar Slytherin wrote in his journals, but I believe their has to be at least some truth to it. According to his journals, Salazar Slytherin and Rowena Ravenclaw fought for the affection of Godric Gryffindor. Even among the founders he was know to be one of the most talented in his field. According to Salazar, Godric was charming and kind to everyone."

"Then what was the problem?" Severus bites his bottom lip trying to gather his thoughts. I spend a lot of time watching him and watching his thought process before he actually speaks.

"Salazar did not truly believe that Godric would choose him. He wrote of an immense love but also bitter acceptance. Godric did not fancy men. Regardless, Salazar did not impose his love on Godric and they were able to remain friends. Rowena was spiteful when she was rejected. In Salazar's and Rowena's competition to gain Godric's affection, he and Helga became intimate with one another. Salazar accepted it. He spoke of the wedding and although he ached over the unrequited love, he admitted that Helga and Godric were a good match. She was awkward but loving to all and Godric was quite smitten. Salazar Slytherin was the best man and he wrote at length about the wedding. The mixture of feelings. He and Godric were very close and he hated that Godric hesitated before asking Salazar to be the best man. Before anything, Salazar valued the other man's friendship. Rowena did not attend the wedding."

"I heard that Salazar Slytherin was well, obsessed with pure blood propaganda." Severus nods.

"That is the standard belief. I have not read anything that disregards that. Honestly only the founders truly know. As far as the journals stated, he left Hogwarts as a way to distance himself from the rejection he felt. During this time he traveled the world and gained knowledge. Learning was his first passion. He eventually had an heir, but it was very much done to continue his family line. I have no reason to believe the journals. History is written by the victors

and everyone is the hero of their own story. Much of what he said could have been embellished or fabricated all together. I have no reason to believe the journals." He states again. "But I do believe them. He spoke of turmoil. Wanting to stay close to his dearest friend, but also knowing that he needed to distance himself."

"What about Rowena Ravenclaw? What ever happened to her?"

"I have not been able to find any history on her aside from she was very intelligent and was a founder. Not much more is really known. Salazar Slytherin spoke of not trusting her, and even she eventually had an heir. In that time with so few wizards, it was greatly encouraged to reproduce. I'm not sure if she ever accepted that her love wasn't returned. I really don't know. Our history books do little to delve into the true lives of the founders." He leans again me comfortably. "I wish I had more to offer you, but most of what I know is likely not relevant to our worries over Dumbledore."

His dark eyes slide shut. It's still very late after all. Deeply he exhales a relaxed breath. "Severus, what do you think his plan could be? I'm not a strategist. I'm not exactly the most intelligent. This isn't my strength. But this is yours. What do you think his plan is?" His eyes stay lightly closed. "If you have any theory at all, I'd really like to know."

"You are to valuable to kill. I'm sure he knows you are still alive. He wants your magical inheritance. He wants to unify the magic of all the founders. I've thought a lot about what his goal could be. I thought that maybe he has intentions of taking over the magical world, but I doubt that. He was so well loved and he had chances to take on a role greater than headmaster. I predict that whatever his goal may be, it has something to do with revenge. He is not a foolish man but he still showed his true colors at an impromptu time. I don't believe he would have done that if his goal was to manipulate the magical world."

"Severus."

"I have spent a lot of time with Albus Dumbledore, but I know very little about the man personally. He didn't share aspects of his past and only glimpses of his personality." Severus squeezes my hand.

"Whatever he's planning. I'll protect you."

"And I'll protect you."

"I know you are scared Harry, you don't have to pretend to be brave."

"Of course I'm terrified Severus. I finally have something to protect."

How far have I come since I first met this man. Hermione is researching about Dumbledore. She is searching for any lead that can find his hiding spot.

What is your plan you crazy old man.

Chapter 71: Breaking and Entering

The voice that comes to me in my dreams is just out of reach. At my core, I know it, but the name of the person eludes me. Sometimes the voice is a male's and sometimes it is a females. Still, the shifting voice always says the same garbled message.

Hermione hasn't found any information on where the old coot could be hiding and with each day, I'm more fearful. He hasn't made another move, and maybe that concerns me more. Why is he stalling. What is he waiting for. Is he waiting for me to find him. Will this battle be as drawn out as the one with Voldemort.

It's been more than a week since his trial and each night the dream becomes clearer, but no answers. No leads. No clues. No real hope.

Severus doesn't have much time for me during the day. He spends it with his Princess prepping every conceivable potion that we may need. Hermione is constantly reading and researching to give us any edge. The Weasleys are using their connections to strengthen our little army. And me? I am still on bed rest. The potions and spells used to heal me zap my energy until it's a struggle to keep my eyes open. I want to help, but ultimately I know that all I can really do is sleep.

Thus the dreams.

Even asking Hermione to research the founders has given us no new information. Every book is a contradiction and no solid facts are present. No tome speaks of the founder's homes outside of Hogwarts only insisting that the castle was everything. So we are very much back to the drawing board.

I still can't shake that there is somewhere. Somewhere my dreams are telling me about. Somewhere. Everything points to none of those places existing though.

Follow your heart it will serve you well.

Follow your instinct it will serve you well.

Follow your brain it will serve you well.

Follow your beliefs it will serve you well.

The voices mesh together repeating those sentences over and over until I cannot pick one voice from another.

Follow your heart it will serve you well.

Follow your instinct it will serve you well.

Follow your brain it will serve you well.

Follow your beliefs it will serve you well.

I don't understand. What should I do? What can I do in this situation.

Follow your heart it will serve you well.

Follow your instinct it will serve you well.

Follow your brain it will serve you well.

Follow your beliefs it will serve you well.

The voices scream and whisper at the same time until I'm sprinting awake gasping for air that I desperately needed. Severus is sleeping next to me. Unconsciously his hand is curled in mine. I don't want to wake him.

"Severus." I lightly shake him and he wakes up easily as he always does.

"What is it?" Comes his gruff displeased voice. He always sounds unhappy when he's woken up.

"I'm hearing voices." He yawns.

"And what are the voices saying." Thank you for not dismissing what I was saying.

"It was four voices, they were each saying something different. It was blending together. One was saying something about following my beliefs, another said, follow my brain, one said follow my heart, and the last said follow my instinct."

He seems to notice how shaky I feel.

"Harry, what do you suggest we do then?" What do I think we should do.

Follow your instincts it will serve you well.

"The chamber of secrets. I want to explore it and see what I can find about Salazar Slytherin, but I can't do alone. I still have difficulties getting around."

"That's exactly why we should wait a little longer until you are more properly healed." He lightly argues. I know he's only insisting on this because he's worried.

"Severus, please. I need your help. We don't know when Dumbledore will strike again and we don't have time to waste. I'm the only one who can speak parseltongue; so, I'm the only one who can get inside."

He wraps his arms around himself in contemplation. His dark eyes look dull from stress and exhaustion. "Are you sure this isn't just a wild goose chase. Harry, what do you think this will accomplish?" The worse may sound dismissive, but his tone is soft. It's easy to see that he's as lost as I am.

"I can't shake the feeling that there is something we are overlooking." He yawns.

"Can it wait until morning?" He asks lightly.

Follow your brain, it will serve you well.

"No." He eyes me but eventually nods. Silently he dresses himself

before preparing clothes for me.

"How many should we bring with us."

"Just us."

"Harry, if we are attacked or found, you aren't in any shape to fight."

"I know Severus, but I feel like we should do this quickly and quietly. I trust our friends, but the chamber of secrets wasn't meant to be seen by just anyone." It's a sacred place. I'm honestly afraid to go there by myself, but I know this is where I should look.

I'm more of a liability right now, but Severus doesn't complain even when one of my arms goes over his shoulder. Easily he helps support my weight.

"Hogwarts will be well protected by aurors, but I'm assuming you don't want anyone to know we are there."

"We don't know who we can trust Severus. I know I'm asking for a lot." He exhales.

"You always were a difficult one. But I do have a few tricks to get into the castle."

Silently we navigate through our safe house making sure to not wake anyone. It's still a couple hours until the sun will rise. One we are a decent distance awake he apparates us into the forbidden forest. His dark eyes are narrow and I've never seen him like this.

He's a spy.

He's been a spy for half of his life and I suppose he will always retain those mannerisms.

Right now, he's searching for any dangers and making sure that we are still unnoticed.

"There are very few secret passages into the castle. This one, only a handful of people know about. It was apparently used by the

founders. As far as I can tell, I'm the only one that can use this passageway."

"Why is that?" I ask.

"Because I'm the only one that knows the password." We are at a tree. It looks no different than any of the other hundreds of trees around it. "The founders created it as a safety precaution. If the castle was ever overtaken and the inhabitants were in danger, this could be used as a swift escape. Ironic that we are using it to break into Hogwarts."

"We don't know who is a friend Severus. We don't know who remains loyal to Dumbledore." He nods solemnly.

"I know Harry." His voice is even and lightly he ruffles my hair. He places his palm on the tree. "We request entry." The bark morphs into a face.

"What reason do you have to use this passage." The face eyes us with scrutiny before relaxing into a sneer. "Coming and going, I should know it to be you. What use do you have of this passage Severus Snape."

"The heir to Gryffindor and I have use of the chamber of secrets."

"Harry Potter. Hogwarts, she has spoken of you. She trusts in you, but she always has favored the heirs to the founders and look where that has gotten her. She is dying due to her favoring. Hogwarts speaks of all who she loves and you are one of her favorites."

I don't know what to say. I've always felt that Hogwarts was somehow alive. "Severus and I would like entry into the castle. Please."

"And what is the password?" The tree directs to Severus.

"Amor et melle et felle est fecundissimus" The tree's mouth open wide until it is large enough to step through. Gently Severus leads me down the path.

"Severus?"

"It means Love is rich with both honey and venom."

"Each founder had their own password that was Salazar Slytherins. Since we used his password, this should lead us to the dungeons. If we knew the password for the other founders, then this path would lead us close to their dormitories." He holds me even tighter. "In his journals he said nothing was a sweet as love, and nothing was as painful."

Chapter 72: Intoxication

I'm as amazed by this secret lair as I was the first time. My arm over Severus's shoulder is all I have for support. The more I move the more exhausted I feel, but when I see his eyes light up at the basilisk's body it's worth the overwhelming soreness.

He's briskly informing me of everything that can be brewed with such a rare ingredient.

"And there are kilometers of scales. Kilometers! Such beautiful fangs. They would make a perfect..." He continues to ramble on and although I don't understand the majority of what he's saying, I love seeing how animated he is.

All at once he remembers that this visit is for business not pleasure.

"Did you not see the basilisk the time Voldemort let you in here?"

"No. I knew of it, but the dark lord kept it in hiding. I knew it was gigantic, but I didn't expect it to be this size." He continues to carry me along through tunnels that I never saw the first time I was down here. "Do you have any idea what exactly we are looking for?"

"No." but "I think I'll know it when I see it." I'm not sure how long I'm hobbling along. He shows me the rooms he has visited as well as the journals he has read. Nothing gives me any clue to Dumbledore's plan or where he could possibly be.

I'm not sure if either of us even know the way back anymore. This labyrinth seems completely randomized. Some paths look ancient with cobwebs lining the entire wall. The air is stale and moderately difficult to breath. "Harry." His voice is patient but still focused and logical as it always is. "We can't stay down here much longer. It's been at least two hours. Eventually we will be looked for and I hate to think what Poppy will do to the both of us for leaving against doctor's orders."

"Just a bit more." Are these halls endless. Do they circle back on themselves. Why is it both familiar and un at the same time. Why is this place comforting and nostalgic. Where are we going. What are my legs searching for.

"Harry."

"Please. I feel like we are so close."

"You're burning up. I think you have a fever." His wonderful skin feels comfortable against my forehead. "We've already pushed your body to much."

"Please. Just a bit more." He exhales in exasperation and crouches down a bit.

"Get on my back. I can carry you at least for a little. You shouldn't push yourself anymore."

"I'm okay. I can for a little bit..."

"Harry. Either get on or get ready to start finding our way back."

I don't know why it's awkward to be carried like this. Maybe it's because I don't believe I've ever been carried before. It feels... really nice actually. Severus. He seems to be just blindly taking any passage that he fancies. Our relationship has changed so much. My arms tightly around his neck, he's arms supporting my legs. I'm sure my weight is a strain on his more frail body. He's healthier than he use to be, but I know this has to be difficult for him to carry me. Still, he doesn't complain. He doesn't falter.

It feels really nice.

It feels...

Safe.

I want to keep him safe. Please. Salazar. The founders. Help me keep the man I love safe.

Loud rumbling startles both of us. The halls themselves are moving

and altering their path until there is a wall behind us and the only path left to take is directly in front of us separated by a single wooden door.

Neither of us say anything, but Severus draw's his wand and hands it to me. He clearly has decided that he will not put me down, and one of us needs to be prepared to cast spells. Or maybe he's just handed me the wand hoping that it will protect me should something happen.

"Be careful." I say, but I already knew he was on alert. His hand grips the door without any ill effects. Squeakily it opens on rusty hinges to reveal a pretty plain looking dark room.

"Should we enter?" Severus asks sanding on the cusp of the doorway.

"I don't think we have any other option." He steps inside and before I can cast Lumos, torches light up the interior. A large circular table with four chairs takes up the center and on each of the four walls is an empty picture frame. Each wall is decorated with one of the house crests and the accompanying colors. "Severus. Put me down." He hesitates, but silently does as I asked. I stagger the first step deeper into the room, but Severus is there to catch me. I gently shrug him off and step closer to center table. "I came." I feel like a total imbecile talking to myself. "Please. I can't be crazy. I know I need to be here."

A figure walks into one of the picture frames. She's older and noble looking.

"My. You do look so much like him. The resemblance is there." Her voice is somber. "Heir to Gryffindor, I am Rowena Ravenclaw." She sighs wisfully. "There was once a time that we would all meet here. I am the only one who ever comes here anymore. My heir. He is causing trouble isn't he."

"Yes. But we don't really know why. We don't know what his end goal is." She nods. Then exhaling again, she repeats...

"You do look so much like him."

"I don't know about that. Most say I look like my father."

"Perhaps so, but it's your aura that so resembles the man I love. My heir has taken the inheritance of all the other founders for himself." She looks ashamed at herself. "I must apologize. It is from me that he crafted such an... extreme idea. I did not have the good conscience to actually fulfill my... research, but it would seem that my heir does. There is a spell I created, it something akin to one of the unforgivable except it works somewhat differently. I was in a dark place and crafted an idea as to how I could gain the affection of the man I loved. I would need a spell that wouldn't just control him, but completely change his thoughts at a deeper level. It would need to be seamless. A spell that would convince the target that they were not even under a spell." She smiles brokenly. "As you could imagine the spell would require strong magic. A magic four times stronger than my own. It's a spell that can only be casted once you see. It would use up everything- all of the surplus magic. My plan was to take the magic from each of my friends and convince them all that the magical world did not exist and that Godric was my husband." She holds up her hand to silence the both of us and because she is such an impressive figure we can't help but remain silent.

"I do not know what cause my heir wishes to accomplish as the spell should act almost as if it is a wish. In a madman's hands I worry. I wanted the man I love and because of how I persisted, I am here roaming the portraits alone knowing that the other's will never trust me in their presence again."

"We have to put an end to him." I say just above a whisper.

"Yes. As my heir has no others in his lineage, my line will end. As has Salazar's. And both Helga and Godric blended their lineage ages ago. All that will be left is you. You are all that's left of our history. My heir is as clever as they come and though I do not know his desire, I fear it in my bones."

"Do you know where he could be?" She nods lowly but doesn't continue. Her eyes for the first time look at Severus.

"Tell me child." She says looking directly at Severus. "What lengths

would you go for the one you love."

"Further than you could ever imagine." She smiles softly at him.

"I do not doubt it. You have the eyes of a starved man. I can see in your eyes how you are prepared to destroy my painting should you feel your love is threatened. You are pathetically prepared to sacrifice your very soul for the sake of the one you love. Even if it leaves you friendless and hated by everyone including yourself. You silly silly fool." She chuckles remorsefully. "I see a bit of myself in you." She exhales. "There is little else I can do. I have made mistakes. So many foolish mistakes. Tell me, will you put a stop to my heir?" She says looking at me.

"Yes. He has to be stopped."

"Then I will aid you. Because you look so much like the man I love." Her eyes are dotted with tears. "There is only one place that I believe my heir could be hiding. In the sky. That is where my home is of course." She tilts her head. "Tell me boy, what would your wish be?"

"My wish?"

"Yes. What would be your wish? Even I so far from society have heard the story of your parent's death. You could wish them back to life but know that not even all four of the founders could stand up to death. They would not exist in the world of the living for long I wouldn't believe."

"I don't know." She smiles.

"You are a good boy I can tell." She smiles softly but the action only seems to break her. "These paintings are made by leaving a little bit of the persons magic behind. It leaves an impression of who the person once was. You can have it." She says forlornly. "You can have it all. The magic of each of the founders. With my soul. With my little piece of magic. Kill my heir and you will have it all." The voice fades to quiet as her painting disappears.

And all I can feel is the intoxication of power.

Chapter 73: Checkmate

The pain and soreness I felt before is gone completely. I've never felt so strong, so well.

"Harry?"

"I know where he is. I don't know how, but I know. I need a broom. We need to get out of this place and get a broom." I'm grabbing his arm and pulling him along. This cavern feels familiar where as before I felt lost. I know the way now. I know it's secrets. You need only trust the mazes of halls and you will arrive where you need to be.

"Harry. How can you be sure."

"Severus. I'm not leaving you behind. I want to. I want to abandon you here knowing that you will not be able to find the way out without me. I want to know that you will be safe. I don't want you to come with me, but I'm not leaving you behind. I'm not charging ahead on my own this time. I know. I know and I need you to trust me on this. Just like you trusted me to come here." He squeezes my hand.

"Do you think you can win against him?" My mouth wants to say 'I'm not sure' but before I can, I say

"Yes."

Never in my life have I felt so sure.

I can't explain the things I just know. I can't explain why everything feels so achingly familiar.

Each founder had a home. A home that was kept private except to the other founders. I know where Dumbledore is hiding, and I need to get there now. I need this to end quickly.

Once out of the chamber of secrets I stop long enough for Severus

to gasp for breath. I should be in just as much need for oxygen, but I don't feel any weakness. I only stopped for him. My heart isn't pounding from the brisk running, and even though Severus is curled over onto himself from dizziness, I am fine.

I hadn't even realized I was pushing Severus so hard.

To his credit, he doesn't complain even when I grab his arm and we begin racing to find a broom. I no longer care if we are seen. I just need to get to Dumbledore now and end him and this intoxication.

No man is meant to hold this much power.

Near the quidditch pitch there is always spare brooms and I don't even question taking one for our purposes. Before I can mount the broom, Severus wraps both of his arms around me.

"Harry. We. We don't have to do this. We can just..." He doesn't finish that sentence. "I don't want to face him. I don't want to fight anymore. I don't want you to die." It's only now that I realize how much he is shaking.

Severus and I don't talk about everything he has lost in his life. We never talk about the real issues because he just wants to forget them. He knows we can't run away. He knows we can't just do nothing. For once we both have to much to live for.

"Severus. I need you to be strong for me. We will win. And we will both walk away from this fight. After this, there will be no more fighting." I turn around so that I can embrace him. "After this you will be free."

He laughs bitterly. "Harry, I will never be free." I kiss him enjoying the taste of my soul bond. I kiss him enjoying this moment of purity before an execution.

"I can't do this without you, but with you, I am unstoppable." Together we both mount the broom, his arms wrap around my middle and his face is pressed into my back. When I lift off I can't make out anything he is saying over the sound of the rushing wind, but I know he is chanting. Chanting counter spells and willing us to

both be safe.

Severus should have never been thrusted into this world of violence and impurity. He would have never been marked as a death eater or bounded to the will of Dumbledore or even myself. He should have been happy. He should have been loved.

Floating weightlessly above the clouds, I see what looks like a mansion in the sky.

"Do you see it Severus?" I ask, but he cannot hear me over his muted chanting. His eyes are tightly shut anyways. Only those that know the mansion is here can see it. I knew it was here. I know he is inside.

I don't bother with stealth as I touch down and leave the broom where it lies. It's only now that Severus sees this impressive hideaway. Natural stone and a garden in full bloom. There seems to be a spell around this mansion that keeps the surrounding area at a comfortable temperature.

I wouldn't be surprised if he already knew we were here.

"Come on Severus. Stay close." I say even though my hand is in his. We walk cautiously towards the entrance and it opens before I have the chance to push on the large door.

"Greetings Heir to Gryffindor. We have been expecting you." The house elf bows lowly and I can see it's age in the deep set wrinkles. This house elf must be ancient. "I will show you the way to the heir of the house." It's only Severus's reluctant pulling towards the exit that has me stalling. I wrap my arm around him and together we walk. His eyes are searching for any danger. They are searching for any trap, but I already understand.

Dumbledore is hoping for this to be a diplomatic meeting. He knew I would come. He hopes to sway me to his side. Right now, he has no need for tricks or violence.

The house elf leads into what looks like a thrown room. Dumbledore is sitting in a high-backed chair on one side of a round

chess table.

"Harry, my boy come and join me. Lemon square?" He offers. This could almost be mistaken as a social visit. Regardless, I take a seat in the chair opposite him. Severus remains standing behind me, never taking his eyes of Dumbledore. I'm completely calm.

My pieces are white so I move my first piece. He counters.

"I must say, you both are looking well." I can feel Severus tense. "That bonding was the best thing that ever happened to the two of you." I move my knight and he smiles jovially. "It has been far to long since I've had a decent chess match. Grent, my house elf was Rowena Ravenclaws house elf. He always lets me win though when we play. Not much fun in that."

"Be both know why I am here Albus." I say while watching his hands move one of his black pieces.

"Yes, of course we do my boy. I am afraid that you have me all wrong though." I counter and take one of his pawns. He doesn't even flinch when my knight impales his pawn. After all, that's all it is. A pawn. "The power is heady isn't it." He moves into a position to take one of my pawns, but I protect it with my knight. Unfortunately I had to forgo taking his queen. "That wasn't a very smart move, you could have taken my queen."

"But I would have had to sacrifice the pawn. I don't want to do that."

"I know, but outside of a game, sometimes it must be done if you wish to be victorious." It aches to talk to him like this. There was a time when I trusted Albus Dumbledore above any other. There was a time when he told me that it was for my own good to remain in a home where I was abused physically, emotionally, and sexually. And I believed him. I believed him. I believed him.

I believed him.

I believed him.

Because Albus Dumbledore had my best interest at heart and he

explained that sometimes in order to be safe, one must suffer.

I believed him.

I can hear Severus struggling to breathe evenly. He doesn't want to outwardly show how terrified he is.

But it's okay.

It's okay because I am not afraid.

And this will not take long.

"Why did you do all this Albus. You were already a strong wizard, but you've put everything in motion just to gain the inheritance of every other heir. You've been manipulating and crafting plans even before I was born."

He smiles in what could only be called a gentle manner. His eyes are half closed.

And then he counters.

"Nothing can be accomplished without power my boy. Surely you know that by now." He turns his attention to the man behind me. "Such a filthy boy willing to bond with anyone. He pledged his mind to me you know. He pledged his mind so that I would protect him from Azkaban and save Lily." He tisks like he's chastising a child. "You turned against your family, you turned against your friend, you turned against the master you pledged your body to, you turned against the master you pledged your mind too. You are truly a fickle thing. How long before you turn against the master you pledged your soul too." Severus says nothing. "Harry my boy, everything was done for this moment. I was so sure you would be charmed by Severus. It seems anyone can be charmed by his sincerity when he is forced into that role. Just as Tom Riddle was. You all see yourselves in him. A scrawny unloved boy." He laughs. "Harry, I require your inheritance. Once you give me that, I will release Severus from his bond to me."

"Severus." I say not turning to look at the man behind me.

"Or didn't he tell you my boy. Naughty naughty." I hear Severus collapsing before I hear him scream. He's curled up rocking while clutching his head. "Give me your inheritance, and I will free him." Instead I stand.

"No." The well-maintained mask drops for a moment and something inhuman flashes through his eyes.

"So you will let him suffer just because you refuse to give up your inheritance!" His voice is thundering.

"It will not matter when you are dead." He draws the elder wand and sends a curse flying towards me. Through screaming I hear Severus chanting a counter curse.

"Please hurry!" He screams. The curse dissipates before it even reaches me.

"Stay out of this." His voice sounds more like a snarl and Severus is now retching on the floor unable to ignore the pain. I promise. I will finish this as fast as I can. Dumbledore doesn't even seem focused on me anymore instead sending a barrage of abuse at Severus weakened body. "You dare think you have the right to stand against me. I am a god and you are a worthless unwanted half nothing."

I send a strong disarming spell at Dumbledore's hand just as he does at mine. Both of our wands clank to the ground. Before I can register that the wand isn't in my hand he's sending a barrage of wandless spells to cut and slash at my skin.

I feel blood sliding down my chin from just under my eye.

"Sectumsempra!" I shout, but Albus is already blocking the powerful curse. He's faster than me. He's stronger than me. He has more knowledge of spells than me. He is more experienced than me. I am clearly outmatched.

But I still know I will win.

Chapter 74: Hand

"Sectumsempra !" I cast again. He's laughing while easily blocking it.

"I have the power of three founders. You cannot win against me. How long will you let your lover suffer? Give me your inheritance, and I will let you both go free."

"Hold on a little longer Severus!" He's going hoarse from screaming and I know he cannot handle this for much longer. There is a pool of his blood leaking from his nose. Be strong Severus.

"You are not my equal!" Dumbledore shouts sending an especially strong curse at me. It throws me back and knocks my breath away.

I have the upper hand. I still have the upper hand. He cannot kill me if he wants my inheritance. But Rowena Ravenclaw gave me the ability to take his power if I kill him. I have the upper hand. He may break my bones or cut me up beyond recognition, but he cannot kill me. He's stamping closer to me and I'm shaking the pain away.

Before he can take another step though, Severus is gripping his ankle with all his strength.

"Leave him alone. Please. He's just a child." Severus pleads. I hear a crack when Dumbledore kicks Severus's weak restraint away.

"Don't touch me with your dirty unworthy blood." Before the words have died in the room Dumbledore is screaming. Severus is gasping as he crawls away. Under Dumbledore's left leg is a symbol drawn in blood. Burns marks are scorched around him and traveling up his leg.

I run to grab Severus up.

"We can't win." He says a bit more clearer. Dumbledore's spell on

him must be weakening without the continual concentration. "We have to leave now." He's trying to push me towards the exit, but I don't budge.

"We can't leave. We can win." Tears are pricking his eyes.

"I don't want you dying." He says collapsing in my arms. It's to late to run anyway. He's coming again.

"Dabbling in blood magic. That's dark even for you." Dumbledore is limping, but otherwise unharmed. He waves his hand and the elder wand flies to the open palm. "You had your chance. Now he dies. Av..." Before he can say the spell he drops the wand in pain. He looks at his burned hand in shock. "What did you do to my wand." He growls at me.

Nothing. I did nothing.

Severus is next to me chanting.

"How." Dumbledore says. "How could you have the strength to stand up against me! I am unstoppable and you are just...."

"Protecting my bond mate. You should have never made us bond. You knew he would fall for me. But you didn't expect me to fall in love with him." Severus is weak. He's struggling to stand, but his focused eyes never leave the man across from us. "If Harry says we are going to defeat you, then we will." I'm not sure if he believes his words, but he hands me his wand. It pulses comfortingly in my hand. It feels more comfortable than any wand I've ever held. Like it belongs to me.

And of course it does. Because it belongs to Severus, and he belongs to me.

"You don't have the stomach to kill me boy."

"I have no problem killing vermin." The killing curse goes flying into the older mans chest. I refuse to look away as his body crumbles as if he were only a pile of dust. I refuse to look away as a man that I once respected above all overs dies at my hand.

"You did it." Severus says, but all I hear is the pounding of my heart as fire courses through my veins. My blood is on fire and all of my senses are pulsing. I'm breathing to fast to actually get any oxygen into my lungs and the overwhelming intoxication is blocking even Severus's voice. He's shaking me. I can feel his fingers digging into my arms as my body is thrashed back and forth. I can see his mouth moving but I hear nothing over the sound of blood rushing through me.

No one should have this much power. This much control.

I need it.

I have to get rid of it.

I need it.

I have to get rid of it.

I need it.

I have to get rid of it.

Severus's is frantically mouthing words but I can't even focus on his lips long enough to read them.

I need it.

I have to get rid of it.

I need it.

I have to get rid of it.

I need it.

I need it.

I need it.

No!

Dumbledore was right. I cannot handle this power.

I have to get rid of it. I need to wish. Wish something. Something to erase all this excess power. Something that I want. Something that I need. Something.

Panic is filling Severus's beautiful dark eyes. His voice cannot reach me, but you reached me a long time ago.

"I wish you were free of all bonds."

All at once all the energy I had is gone. All at once I'm fighting sleep- and losing. I can hear the walls crumbling. The magic keeping this building alive is gone. I feel Severus swing me over his shoulder and run for the exit, but I can't move. Even as I see the walls and ceiling turning to dust as time catches up with this magical place.

Even the house elf bowing to me as Severus frantically escapes this place. The house elf is rapidly aging and decaying no longer drawing off the magic to keep him alive.

"Thank you." The elf says as he collapses in a heap on the floor. The garden is wilting by the second and crumbling out of the sky. Severus barely manages to grab the broom.

But at that point- I really don't care anymore.

I trust Severus, and honestly, I may have won against Dumbledore, but this battle against the darkness of unconsciousness.

It's already won.

Even unconscious I can feel myself being touched. I can feel myself being prodded and repositioned. I'm to tired to worry if I am safe or not.

A hand cradles mine and never leaves. The cool skin is comforting.

Sometimes I hear voices, but that hand never leaves mine.

Sometimes I feel other hands and I want to fight them away, but that hand around mine never wavers so I allow it.

I allow it for that reassuring hand.

When I do have enough strength to open my eyes the room is dark. But that hand is still connected to mine.

"Harry." The voice sounds weak, but breathtakingly beautiful. "You are awake." My eyes can't adjust to the lack of light, but I nod to the faceless person not sure if I really am awake or not. When the hand leaves my own, I feel empty.

"I have to get Poppy. She needs to know you've woken up." Is all the voice says as they leave me in the dark. I don't like the dark, but I'm not alone for long.

The hand returns to mine and it makes it more bearable that another set of hands are undressing me.

"Are you in pain Harry?" That's right, the hand said they were going to get Poppy. I like Poppy.

I like this hand. It's a nice hand.

"He doesn't appear to be fully coherent. His magical core is very weak right now." The new hands are pressing gently and though it doesn't hurt and though I like Poppy. I don't want to be touched right now.

Well, I guess I wouldn't mind if it was that hand.

"I'm sure he will make a full recover, though I don't know how powerful his magic will be without the inheritance that was filling him. For now Severus, you will just have to be patient." Oh. The hand belongs to Severus. Yeah that makes sense. "You should be satisfied that he's shown signs of consciousness; so, please get some rest. He's being well monitored. You are still injured too."

But I don't want the hand to leave. I like the hand.

"I'm fine." The raspy voice says. "I'm going to stay here just in case he wakes up and has questions."

Even when the new hands... Poppy leaves, the cool comforting hand

stays in mine.

The dark surrounds us both, but I'm not as afraid of it this time.

Because the hand never leaves mine.

Chapter 75: Broken Bonds

I wouldn't say that I feel like I am completely back to normal, but I am completely coherent and I feel so much better. Severus will not let any of the press in to get the story, and he refuses to speak to any of them. I am not allowed to leave this private hospital room in the medical wing. Poppy's orders. She's more than upset with the two of us, but we both realize she's waiting until we are well to chastise us like children.

Severus looks haggard from lack of sleep and lack of eating. I can tell he hasn't bathed since I was brought to this room. It's been nearly a week. His hair is matted and greasy. His eyes are bloodshot. He smells faintly of sweat, ash, and something just him. I don't know that I've ever though he looked this beautiful. I just can't help but smile at him.

"Why." He pauses to gather his thoughts. "Why did you break our bond?" He asks. His eyes are not as clear. His confidence is wavering. "Did you not wish to be bonded to me anymore." I can see his forced calm. I can see the way he's choking down all emotions. He's trying to be an adult right now. He's trying to not show how hurt he feels.

"I broke our bond because I love you. I wanted you to be free." It hurts to talk after so long. I grab his hand in mine and it feels so natural after endless days of his hand never leaving mine. "Severus, I want to marry you. I know that we can't get soul bounded again, but I would rather a bond that we choose. I wanted you to be free. No one has any claim to you at all. You do not belong to anyone." I kiss his fingertips. "Your body, mind, and soul belong only to you right now, but I want all of it. And I want you to be the one to give it to me. And I want to give my body, mind, and soul to you. I just want us to decide our relationship. I don't want a bond forced out of necessity. I want a bond that we create out of love. Severus, will you please marry me."

His mouth is parted and tired bloodshot eyes water until there is

unrestrained tears. He can't find words to say. Instead his salty tears fall on the bed sheets around me.

"Severus?" I ask gently.

"I thought you didn't want me anymore." The words are to vulnerable to come out of his mouth.

"I will never stop loving you Severus. Please. Marry me?" I ask again. His eyes are clinched shut and he's nodding not trusting his own voice. Hands clutch my shirt and his face is buried into my chest. Only his shaking shoulders tell me of how much tension he must have felt all this time. Fear. Loneliness. And now a moment of bliss. "I love you Severus." I say stroking his hair.

"Love you." He says between sobs. So much. This world has put him through so much. This bed is much to small for the two of us, but I slide until I'm half off the bed and gently I encourage him to climb in next to me.

Wrapped in each other we both seem to exhale at the same time.

My magic will never be as strong as it once was with my inheritance, but I can feel my magic thrumming, and it only intensifies with Severus so close.

"Severus. Can you perform the ritual to bond us in marriage?"

His fingers tangle in mine.

"I can. But we should wait. We would need to consummate out union, and both of us..."

"Please Severus. I don't want to wait any longer. I hate not being bonded to you. If you are okay with us becoming bonded now, then I don't want to wait."

"Let me at least take a shower." He says pulling away.

"Severus, I need you."

"F..fine." He says and then casts a wandless cleaning spell. It

certainly isn't as clean as taking a bath, but I can't wait, and something tells me neither can Severus. I hate to pull away from him, but I do, so that I can undress completely. I don't want anything between us. I'm already aroused just looking down at him. He doesn't move as I stand over him. He doesn't move as I unbutton each and every one of those many buttons he always hides behind.

"Do you want this Severus?" I ask gently. His shirt is open exposing his creamy pale skin. He nervously licks his lips and nods. "Severus, if you want, we can switch roles. If you would feel more comfortable taking the dominate role, then I'm willing to be submissive for you." His cheeks are pink and he looks away from me. His hand is around my wrist.

"I'm nervous. I'm still not very comfortable with Sex, but with you... I like to be held. I like to be held gently."

It's so very different from our first time. The room isn't dark. He's not resistant. He's not frantically trying to calm himself.

He wants this. The tent in his pants and half lidded look is enough to tell me how deeply his both wants this, and his hand tightly clutching my wrist is enough to tell me that his very being wants this.

"Harry, repeat after me. I pledge my magic."

"I pledge my magic."

"I pledge my soul."

"I pledge my soul."

"I pledge my heart body and mind."

"I pledge my heart body and mind." He smiles at me. It's light and content.

"Both sick and well."

"Both sick and well."

"For my life belongs to you."

"For my life belongs to you."

I feel an intoxication. Similar and yet so very different than the magic of the founders. That intoxication was corrupt at it's core, but this. This is a pleasant warmth. The bond we shared before wasn't like this. It didn't feel like this. It didn't feel this comfortable. It didn't feel this healthy. I can feel our very love for each other. It's alive and pulsing between us.

"I do."

"I do." The magic calms but the exhilaration doesn't fade at all. Right now more than ever, I want to touch him.

I need to make love to him now.

Chapter 76: Consummation

Knees are bend on either side of my head. My nose is buried in the mound of pubic hair as I greedily suck him. His hand is desperately trying to push my mouth away, but I keep hungrily sucking.

"Har... Harry no more. That's enough. No more!" Even as he's arching his back and his hips are trembling, his hand is pushing against my forehead. But I can't stop. I've never tasted anything as intoxicating as the drops of precum on my tongue. "Harry. I can't. It's dirty. A cleaning charm isn't enough. I should... I need to take a bath first." No. I don't want anything masking this taste.

"Severus, you are so delicious it's turning me on." Trying to calm him, I lay a flat hand on his abdomen and with my other hand I grasp his erection. My thumb is on the underside pressing against the tip. A lewd looking vein tempts me so I suck on it lovingly. It feels so good to just trace it with my tongue.

"Harry! You have to stop. I can't. If you keep doing that then I won't be able to last. You have stop."

"Then cum. Stop holding back. If you need to cum then just go ahead. Severus, don't make me stop." He's biting his bottom lip in a futile attempt to restrain his lovely voice. He will never have another experience like our first time.

He was so afraid. He was trying so hard to not be 'present'.

"Harry, just... let me prepare myself first. I have to before you..."

"I'll do it in a bit Severus. Let me enjoy you first."

"Harry. Please. I'll do it. No more. I'll do it." His body is trembling. "I'll do it. It's dirty. I don't want you touching... dirty. I can't anymore Harry." His entire body is flushed a pretty pink.

"Does this not feel good?" He's biting his bottom lip. "Do you not

like this?"

"Dirty." Is his weak reply.

"Severus. I want to do this. I want to make you feel good. You aren't dirty. I want to be the one to make you come undone. I want to taste you, and prepare you, and get you off. If you don't like this then I'll stop. I don't want to do anything you don't like. I'm not going to decide for you if something feels good or not, but don't decide for me either. Severus being able to touch you like this is really turning me on. I think I could cum just by sucking you." I smile at him gently. I know his traumas will never be erased completely. He will likely always be nervous with intimacy, but he's not going to find any doubt or reason to be self conscious with me. "Do you not like this?" I ask again. My thumb presses against the head of his dick and droplets of precum leak out.

Dark eyes close tightly. Pale cheeks turn a pretty rosy shade. "It feels good. Really good."

"Then relax and let yourself feel good." His eyes are covered by his elbow. I don't comment on the tears he's trying to hide.

"Harry. I'm self-conscious. I'm not like you. You're young and attractive. I'm malnourished, scarred and ugly. I don't feel comfortable being shown this much attention."

I want more of him. I want to kiss every inch of him.

"Severus, look at me." He shakes his head keeping his face hidden. "Severus." I say gentler. When he still is unresponsive I dot light kisses up his abdomen until I get to his chest. My thumb presses against one of the hard nubs and when he shivers, I smile against his skin. "I love you so much. I want to discover all the places that you feel good." As I stroke him fully, his back arches into my touch. I want to lavish his body is so much love he could drown. I want to touch him so deeply he could never forget the feel of my fingertips. When I capture one of his erect nipples between my teeth, he reluctantly lets out a keening moan. "You are so beautiful." The kind words only seem to excite his starved body more.

His back arches with every stroke of my finger and his body has long since succumbed to me. I want him in my mouth again.

"Harry!" He shouts when I engulf all of him. "No more. No more." He says breathless. He's panting and I know he's close. One final suck and he's screaming his climax. I swallow what I can but he's still leaking so much. I really like how he tastes.

I don't want to waste it.

As I'm cleaning up his essence and savoring every drop, the door opens and Severus freezes entirely. My thumb presses against the head of his dick forcing another tasty droplet out. Gathering it on my tongue I turn to the intruder.

"Come back later." My voice doesn't even sound like my own. Any shame I should feel at being caught is nonexistent. I honestly don't care right now. I have my prize. My husband.

Severus however is mortified.

To her credit though, Poppy looks completely unfazed.

"Harry, don't be too rough on him, both of you are still healing." And she leaves the door making sure to lock it behind her.

"I'll never be able to face her again." He says mournfully. His entire body language shows just how ashamed and embarrassed he feels.

"Severus."

"Harry. I'm not...I don't think I'm in the mood anymore." I kiss his pale hip and bite down on the juncture of his thigh and groin. I suck and nibble until I'm sure I've left an impressive love bite.

"Severus. You have nothing to be ashamed of. Everyone should know not to open a door with both of us inside without knocking. Now, I'm going to prepare you so that we can finally consummate our bonding."

"I can prepare myself."

"No Severus. Let me. Please."

"I've never had someone else prepare me. Harry... I don't want it to hurt."

"I promise Severus. You aren't going to feel any pain." My fingers intertwine with his and I can feel his body relax. I don't want to do this dry though. I need something to loosen him up with. He waves his hand and a tube of lube flies to his hand.

"I always... I made sure to always have some with me. If I didn't prepare myself then I might would get ripped so... I just... it's a habit to carry it with me." His free arm is slung over his eyes again. I take it from him and throw it into a nearby trashcan. "Harry. It's dry if you don't use something to..."

"I know Severus. But I'm not using that. Do you trust me?" He moves his arm and looks at me. He's nodding slowly.

"More than anyone else."

"Good. I'm going to prepare you. Can you turn around for me?" I keep my voice calm and even and even though I know he must be embarrassed, he does. He looks so sexy propped up by his elbows. His erection is hanging erotically between his legs. "Just try to relax for me Severus." With the first press of my tongue against his puckered hole he shivers. It only encourages me more. I stroke him slowly.

"Harry, I would really prefer to take a bath first." Sweat. Velvety skin. I want him right now.

"Severus, you taste wonderful."

"Please don't say something so.."

"It's true. I'm enjoying this as much as you are." I softly prod my tongue against his hole and his hips nearly give out. "I might even be enjoying it more." It's a slow process of adding a finger in conjunction with my tongue, pulling it out, and sucking affectionately. It's so amazing to be able to touch him. My hands squeeze his pale globes. Spreading his cheeks I get a good look at

his twitching opening.

"Harry, that's enough. I want yours inside of me."

"Severus, I don't want to hurt you. Just let me prepare you a little bit more."

"Please." He begs quietly. "I can't wait anymore. It's enough. You've done enough. I want it."

It feels so nice to be this close to him. I kiss the back of his neck and whisper in his ear. "Then take it."

"Harry, I've never been the one in control."

"Then this will be a first for both of us. And there is nothing embarrassing about that. If you or I don't feel good, then we will try something else."

"Harry, I don't know what I'm doing.." I actually laugh and he looks at me confused.

"You don't have to be any good." He laughs as well.

"We've come a long way since then."

"Yea, it feels like seventy-six years. What do you say Severus, are you ready to consummate our union." He smiles and exhales.

"Just like a man to only think about sex."

"How could I not with someone so delectable in front of me."

"We really should get your eyes checked." I move and he crawls out from under me. I lay on my back and he straddles me. I could cum just from this if I'm not careful. "Harry, could you put it in for me. I think if I tried I would cum."

One hand is on his hip to steady him the other is firmly gripping my own erection. He's to sexy for his own good. For a moment I just enjoy rubbing my leaking head against his twitching hole. It keeps spasming as if desperately trying to take me in, but instead I just

rub my precum against the needy muscle.

"Harry, don't tease me." His jaw is slack as I push down on his hip until he's fully seated in my lap. He's panting and I have to remind myself to not thrust up immediately.

"Severus, are you okay?"

"Good." Tears are dotting his eyes and it's making me nervous. "Harry. Feels... ah..." His trembling hips are rocking instinctively. "Never felt good like this."

"It's all you Severus. You are the one desperately rocking against my dick. You are the one making us both feel good."

"Embarrassing."

"Beautiful. Keep going." His body is frantic as it rocks faster. Each twitch of his body lets me know how needy he is. "That's it Severus. Keep going."

"Harry. I'm sorry." His body is convulsing. "Too much." His erection is rubbing against my stomach and he can't last much longer. "Harry. I think I'm going to finish first." My arm wraps around him and pulls him against my chest. Between his desperate grinding and me thrusting deeper inside of him I'm not surprised when he screams his release and collapses on my chest. Panting and whimpering, his hand intertwines with mine. Before I can pull out though, his other hand reaches behind him to kneed my balls. "Why are you trying to pull out, you haven't finished yet." He sounds so tired.

"I can just finish on my own Severus. I didn't want to put your body through more."

"What's the point though if we both don't finish. Please Harry. I want you to keep going and finish inside of me." Oh Merlin this man turns me on. "HARRY!"

"You keep squeezing around me. You feel so good. You turn me on so much."

"Deep. Too deep!"

"Is this okay Severus. Does this feel good."

"Good. Ohh. Good."

"Me too. It feels like I'm melting inside of you. I love you Severus. I love you."

"Love... love.. you." His eyes are tightly closed as he limply takes each thrust. "Harry right there. Cum right there. Please."

Fuck.

The coil inside me snaps and all I can do is coat his insides with all of my cum. His body shutters and he's whimpering as the hot fluids leak out of him.

"I love you Severus." His head is against my chest and the weight is so pleasant that I'm quickly falling asleep. But before I fall asleep, I hear his quiet response.

"I'm the luckiest man alive."

Chapter 77: Honeymoon

His eyes are closed in relaxation. His head lightly against my shoulder. His fingers are intertwined in mine as we once again sit on this sofa. Reta Skeeter presses the disenchanted quill to her lips.

"You both have been out of touch with the population recently. Can you truly say that the war is over?"

"Most definitely." Severus hums in contentment beside me. "Albus Dumbledore is gone and the magical world is finally at peace." She smiles and allows her quill to begin writing.

"Can you tell me anything about the battle?" Severus's eyes open and I immediately steer the conversation in a different direction.

"Severus and I defeated him together. We would rather look to the future from here on. We have renewed our bond and it is stronger than ever." Severus's eyes close again. He's been tired lately. It's partially my fault. Poppy wouldn't allow us out of the medical wing until she was positive that we were both well. Severus wouldn't leave my side.

And any moment I was allowed to enjoy my new groom- I did.

He's slept some, but I'm very taken with him. And he seems just as happy to be embraced.

Rita asks a few more questions and I answer them while Severus relaxes against me. He wouldn't normally be so defenseless, but I think he's realized that the war really is over. His bonds and shackles were all broken and any bond he makes is one that he has chosen. It's a level of freedom that I know he hasn't ever experienced.

"And what will you two do now with your newfound freedom?" I smile at her.

"Severus and I are going on our honeymoon. We are going to be out of the media for as long as we desire. Only a few people are going to know where we will be and how to reach us. We are going to be traveling and enjoying this peace that is finally here." She smiles and thanks us for the interview. Severus takes my arm and we apparate away. We already have our luggage shrunken down and in our pockets. This was the last thing I had on my agenda before I was ready for us to leave.

But Severus has a task as well.

The stone brings up swirling emotions.

James Potter. Lily Potter.

The grave in Godric's Hollow is barren and I feel like I should tend to it. Maybe leave flowers some time. Severus didn't say that we were stopping here. He never said anything about this- only saying that he had some business to do before we left that he really should have done sooner.

I thought it would be something like emptying out a vault or repaying a debt. I really wasn't sure. But I didn't expect to see my parents grave. I've never been here. I never wanted to come here. Maybe that makes me a bad son, but it just stirs up the empty feeling of being alone that I've already tried to silence.

"Lily, I'm sorry that it's been so long since I've visited." He's kneels in front of the grave. "I promised you that once this war was over then I would break the bond between myself and your son. I promised you that I would not steal his freedom away and I would allow him to find someone that he could find happiness with. I'm sorry Lily, but I've fallen in love with your son. I know that my love for him is unconventional. I'm sure that I am not someone you would wish for your son, but I will do everything in my power to see to it that he is happy and never wants for anything. We are a good match- me and your son. He makes me happy in a way I didn't know was possible. I believe I am good for him as well. I don't think anyone could love him as much as I do. I know that you may not be able to forgive me for taking your son, but all I can do is ask for your forgiveness because I can't bare to give him back."

It's quiet. I say nothing as the swirl of emotions subside. My mother was always at the forefront of his mind. I believe that he did love her- in a way. After a long pause he stands and gathers me in his arms.

"If there is anything you ever want or need please tell me."

"All I've ever wanted was a family. And I have that now." He laughs lightly and I can feel the pull of apparating.

The only one able to find and contact us is Niffy or her children. They are following us on our little journey. Neither of us have really planned or set a course. There are places of course that we may happen upon, but we are going wherever the wind takes us. To America to see what neither of us have ever seen, and to the far country side. North where snow always falls. Everywhere.

Severus has never been permitted to go very far due to his master's various orders- and the shackles that he himself placed. He wishes to see everything he has read about.

I have my own agenda. I wish to see Severus's eyes light up in as many locations as possible. The Aroura can make Severus's eyes sparkle with all of the beautiful polar lights. In the evenings we either find a suitable place to lodge, or apparate back home where Niffy will be waiting for us with a home cooked meal we can eat as a family.

As much as we both want to see the world, we also don't want to be away from our loved ones. Wendy will enthusiastically ask us about our adventures each night before sleep and Severus and I recount the day.

At night we lay in bed next to each other. Deciding where we should go the next day. Severus will lay his head on my arm and hum contently.

"Anywhere is fine Harry. Anywhere is fine as long as we are together." Right now we don't have a plan for the future. We don't have a plan to stop seeing the wonders this world has always had, but never shown us.

"I love you Severus."

"And I love you, you troublesome brat."

We don't have a plan for our future, but right now we aren't bothered. The future will come and it has it's place, but that's a story for another day.

Chapter 78: Mpreg Epilogue

Just as a note, this does include mention of mpreg. But you do not have to read this chapter if you do not want to read mpreg. The last chapter is a suitable ending. And with this chapter this story is finally complete.

****

He swats my hand.

"Damn it Harry. Would you stop touching me." I answer him by kissing the back of his neck.

"I can't help it, you just look so sexy." He groans when I bite a pretty pink mark into his skin.

"Harry, I have work to do."

"Yea. Me too." I pull him back into the bed. "I haven't finished turning you into a puddle yet."

"Potions. Have to."

"Later Severus." I kiss his collar bone, and he whines. "You can brew them in a little while. I'll help you." He laughs and it feels so light that it's hard to believe he's the same dark oppressing person he use to be.

"I don't need help *blowing* up my workroom Mr. Potter." He purrs. Merlin this man.

"I can chop and dice and all that though."

"I'm sure I could find you a really dirty task for you to do."

"Anything to spend time with you."

"Merlin, we sound like a sappy newlywed couple." We really do, but

we aren't newlyweds. The war has been over for almost three years.

"Come on Severus, looking at you has turned me on. I can't help but want to touch you." The pad of my index finger presses against one of his swollen nipples.

"Harry, no." He moans open mouthed. "You know I'm to sensitive there."

"They are so pretty and red. Swollen. I know how sore they feel. Doesn't it feel good having them gently played with?" His ears are red.

"Harry. Yes. But." He's trying to shake his embarrassment away. "If you play with them it'll leak out."

"What will leak out Severus. Tell me." Still so shy with intimacy. I try not to tease him to much, but he's so cute painted pink.

"The milk." His eyes connect with mine and I'm sure a part of him is ashamed of that admission.

"Why would that bother me Severus?"

"It's... No one would want... It's disgusting."

"There is nothing disgusting about a mother's breast milk. If me playing with them like this makes your nipples less sore, then I'm more than happy to play with them. Honestly, it turns me on. I love seeing you feel good. Covered in cum in breast milk."

"Harry that's..."

"It's such a beautiful sight." He has quite a bit more weight on him. He no longer has jutting bones. We wanted a child. I was afraid that he would continue starving himself once he was pregnant, but I was very happy to see him diligently eating two meals a day and two light snacks. When Caleb was born, I was amazed by how much I already loved him. This screaming mass of wrinkly skin was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. I immediately understood why my mom would give up her life for mine. I would do anything for my son. For my first born.

He's two now and Severus and I both decided it was time.

"Does it feel good?"

"Yes. Very good. Harry you can... inside."

"Shh." I hush him. "You are going to have to make due with this for now." I say thrusting between his legs. My hand is on his large distended stomach. He's getting close to term. Severus is so cute I can't always be gentle with him. Sometimes I want him so bad I just want to slam in and out of him. Often he wants the same thing. But at eight months I would only ever take him gently. For now, we will both have to be satisfied with this blissful skin to skin contact.

It's completely bliss having my body pressed against his. Grinding and working us both over. Even as he's pumping us both together with his long beautiful fingers, I'm carefully tracing the stretchmarks coving his baby bump.

"Have I told you how beautiful you look pregnant with our child." He whines throatily. Severus loves praise and compliments- even though he will never admit it. "It really is hard for me to keep my hands off of you, I just get so turned on by you."

"H...arry that's... that's enough." His hand releases us to fervently clasp the sheets. His back is arching as he struggles to stave off orgasm.

"So sexy." He loves being adored. As shy as it makes him, he loves it. His leaking cock is dripping precum on the sheets beneath us.

"Harry, I need your inside."

"I don't want to hurt the baby."

"You won't. You won't. I need it. I'm hurting... inside."

"Hurting? Or do you mean aching. Are you feeling needy Severus?"

"Needy. Please. Harry. Don't tease me. You're the one who made me like this. It's your fault for making it feel good." And how can I say no to that. I'll just have to be as gentle as I can with him. I know

he's okay when he moans open mouthed as I seat myself fully inside him. His legs are trembling and his knuckles have gone white from holding the sheets so tightly.

"Can I move Severus."

"No. No. Not yet. If you... uhhh. If you.. then I'll cum."

"You shouldn't have said that."

"Ahh!" His body collapses in a spasming mess under me. Carefully I pull out and thrust entirely back in. I'm rewarded with another moan and tremor. Severus loves intimacy. He loves sex. He loves the pleasure.

We were on our 'honeymoon' for about a year. It really only ended when Severus and I decided we wanted a bigger family. Even then, it only ended once we knew Severus was pregnant.

I remember the night we conceived our first born. We were having a picnic in the snow somewhere in Alaska. We put a blanket down and I just couldn't help throwing a well-aimed snowball at my husband. Of course never to take an attack without revenge, it quickly because a snowball fight.

The warming charm only did so much as I was eventually tackled into the deep snow. The victor took the spoils, a chilled kiss. It was cold, but that did nothing to cool his passion and right there he straddled me. Desperately he took what he wanted until we were both to sated to move. He was so sexy.

"You came so quickly." I tease.

"It's your own fault. I told you I was close." He says panting. His channel is tightening around me. "But you seem pretty close as well." He says cheekily. The tempting little minx.

"How can I help it. It feels so good inside of you." I can't do more than one more thrust until I'm filling him up. I kiss his cheek and he limply collapses into the mattress. I can't help but rub his damp body.

"I told you to quit touching." He chastises again.

"I can't help it. You just look so beautiful. I can't believe you are mine." I can't believe I have a family. A real family that is all my own. I lay my hand over his rounded belly and I can feel our child kick. She's going to be a good play mate to her older brother. Our own little Princess.

"Do you think Rose and Caleb will get along?"

"I'm sure they will bicker and fight just like all siblings, but yes, I think they will get along."

"I just hope I'm able to give them what they need." He says while rubbing his stomach.

"You will. You always do. Honestly, I'd love if this little one could favor me. Caleb wants absolutely nothing to do with me if mommy is around." Severus smiles because he knows it's true. "I'm more worried about our little girl falling for uncle Draco's son.

"As long as they are willing to babysit, then I'm fine if Rose is taken with their son." He yawns. "We should try to sleep though. Tomorrow it's our turn to watch the boys." I kiss his neck and he groans throatily. "Harry, I'm tired."

"I'm sorry, but looking at you turns me on." He lightly shoves me.

"Then go to sleep. I'm tired." Reluctantly I shimmy under the blankets. He curls against me and we silently relax in each other's comfort. "But I'm not against being woken to a blowjob." I kiss the top of his head.

"Anything for the mother of my children."

It's probably best if we don't have anymore after Rose is born. I think I may enjoy seeing Severus pregnant with my child. I would hate for this to turn into a kink... more than it already has. I'm already hard again, but I'll let him rest. After all we have the rest of our lives to consummate our love. I can wait one night.